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ABSTRACT

The key skills: communication, numeracy, interpersonal, information technology, learning, and problem-solving have been identified as underlying good performance in the labor market now and in the future. The factors most important to development of key skills and ways of facilitating young people's development of those skills were examined in a study of British schools, training suppliers, and employers. Data were collected from the following sources: discussions with staff members and teachers at 20 schools that were selected to be representative in terms of geographic location, age range, performance in examinations, and other variables; questionnaires distributed to students at 15 of the schools; discussions with training suppliers delivering key skills training within their Modern Apprenticeship programs in the former Avon area; surveys of students in 8 of the training organizations, and discussions with 22 employer representatives from the former Avon area. The research highlighted the need for further promotion of the importance of key skills and understanding that key skills are important now and for future employability. A continued and ongoing focus on basic skills extended from early education onward was advocated. (A key skills map is appended. The document contains 13 references.) (MN)

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Developing the Key Skills of Young People:

an evalation of initiatives in the former Avon area

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The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in human resource issues. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, professional and employee bodies, and foundations. Since it was established over 27 years ago the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has a multidisciplinary staff of over 50. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy and publications.

IES aims to help bring about sustainable improvements in employment policy and human resource management. IES achieves this by increasing the understanding and improving the practice of key decision makers in policy bodies and employing organisations.

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Contents

Executive Summary ix

1. Introduction 1

1.1 Research objectives 1
1.2 What are Key Skills? 2
1.3 Research methods 3
1.4 Structure of the report 3

Section 1: Schools

2. Schools' Approaches to Delivery of Key Skills 5

2.1 The school survey 6
2.2 Objectives of Key Skills initiatives in schools 8
2.3 What are schools doing on Key Skills? 11
2.4 Overall approaches to Key Skills 17
2.5 Connections between Key Skills and other initiatives 22

3. Who is Involved in the Delivery of Key Skills? 24

3.1 Who is involved? 24
3.2 Perceptions of Key Skills 26
3.3 Equipping schools to deliver Key Skills 31

4. Delivery of Key Skills in Practice 34

4.1 Learning experiences which develop Key Skills 34
4.2 Recording and assessing Key Skills 39
4.3 Success factors and barriers schools encounter in delivering Key Skills 42
4.4 Impact of Key Skills development on young people 42
4.5 Challenges schools are facing 47

Section 2: Training Suppliers

5. Training Suppliers — Approaches to Delivery of Key Skills within Modern Apprenticeship Programmes 48

5.1 The training supplier survey 48
5.2 Objectives of delivering Key Skills 49
5.3 Overall approach to delivery Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeship programmes 52
5.4 Who is involved in delivery Key Skills? 56

6. Training Suppliers — Delivery of Key Skills in Practice 64

6.1 Introduction of Key Skills to Modern Apprentices 64
6.2 Activities and assignments for developing and assessing Key Skills 66
6.3 Assessment of Key Skills 70
6.4 Factors which contribute to effective delivery of Key Skills 71
6.5 Barriers and problems which training suppliers encounter in delivering Key Skills 72
6.6 How well schemes operated by schools and training suppliers complement each other 75
6.7 Impact of Key Skills delivery in Modern Apprenticeships 76
6.8 What more could be done to support Key Skills development? 80

Section 3: Employers

7. Employers' Perceptions of Key Skills 81

7.1 Introduction 81
7.2 The nature of the employers surveyed 82
7.3 Employers' demand for Key Skills 82
7.4 Employers' satisfaction with the Key Skills of young applicants 91
7.5 Transition from education into employment 95

8. Employers — Approaches to Developing Key Skills 99

8.1 Development of Key Skills 99
8.2 Barriers and problems which employers encounter in developing the Key Skills 104
8.3 Assessment of Key Skills 106
8.4 Impact of Key Skills development 109

Section 4: Conclusions

9. Implications of the Research 111

9.1 Issues arising from the research 111
9.2 Recommendations 116

Appendix : Key Skills Map 120

Glossary 121

Bibliography 122

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) was commissioned by the Western Training and Enterprise Council (WESTEC) to undertake research to assess the impact of Key Skills development on young people. WESTEC, together with its partner organisation Learning Partnership West, have developed a range of initiatives to promote the development of Key Skills among young people. The Key Skills are: communication, application of number, IT, working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving. The aim of the study was to explore factors which contribute the most effectively to the development of Key Skills, and to provide insights which will influence future developments. Research was undertaken within schools, training suppliers and employers. We summarise the findings from each in turn. It should be noted at the outset of this report that WESTEC's Key Skill related activities are fast changing and the situation may have changed several instances since the time of the fieldwork for this research.

Research in schools

The first section of the report considers the delivery of Key Skills in schools. The school fieldwork was conducted in 20 schools between November 1997 and March 1998. Each visit involved discussions with senior members of staff, teachers with responsibility for delivering Key Skills in schools, and students. A questionnaire was distributed to young people in 15 of the schools. The sample of schools included a range in terms of geographic location, age range, performance in examinations, courses offered and initiatives they were involved in. Most of the schools visited had already begun implementing Key Skills initiatives.

Schools' approaches to the delivery of Key Skills

Objectives of Key Skills in schools

Respondents in schools (teaching staff and senior managers) were asked what was the objective of introducing Key Skills programmes or initiatives into schools. The most common responses related to improving the employability of young people and to equipping young people as effective learners. The other main benefits of introducing Key Skills were viewed as providing a broader education, recognising the skills young people already have, meeting the requirements of GNVQ courses and preparing for the likely future requirements of GCSE, 'A' level, UCAS, and the new 'National Record of Achievement'.

What are schools doing on Key Skills?

The Key Skills were being delivered in schools through a range of programmes and initiatives at different Key Stages. In summary these were:

- **Key Stage 3**: Superskills, extra-curricular activities such as activities in PSE, activities weeks and school camp
- **Key Stage 4**: ASDAN Youth Award Scheme, Compact 2000, GNVQ Part 1 pilots, personal profiling and organisers for signing off Key Skills, records of achievement, action planning and careers lessons within PSE, and pre-16 work experience
- **Post 16**: GNVQ, GNVQ Key Skills units for 'A' and 'AS' level students, CLAIT, the Diploma of Achievement, enrichment activities and general studies.

Overall approaches to Key Skills

Most schools did not have an overall plan relating to Key Skills across the school, as yet. Instead, a series of disintegrated packages were being introduced in different parts of the school, at the different Key Stages and for different courses.

There were two main approaches to delivering Key Skills within schools:

- integrating Key Skills into the curriculum, schemes of work and GNVQ assignments, and
- stand alone or 'bolted on' activities to cover Key Skills, such as stand alone Key Skills lessons for GNVQ, or separate activities to cover Key Skills in PSE, *eg* the Diploma of Achievement programme.

It was generally agreed that the preferred approach was to integrate Key Skills into the curriculum. However, this was not always possible. In the most part, this was due to a lack of resources in terms of time to identify where Key Skills are covered in the curriculum, and to devise activities to cover them explicitly. The lack of Key Skills among staff themselves and basic skills among pupils, as well as a shortage of computer equipment, also presented difficulties.

Connections between Key Skills and other initiatives

Connections were identified between Key Skills and the following initiatives and programmes, in which schools were also involved:

- Compact 2000
- ASDAN Youth Award
- Action planning
- Work experience
- Records of achievement
- The new 'National Record of Achievement'
- CLAIT
- Basic skills programmes
- Enrichment activities
- Education business links, and
- Careers education and guidance.

Who is involved in the delivery of Key Skills?

- **Senior managers and head teachers:** in all the schools visited were committed to introducing Key Skills and this was viewed as critical for the success of Key Skills initiatives. Responsibility for managing Key Skills programmes and initiatives was delegated to Key Skills or programme co-ordinators.
- **Key Skills co-ordinators:** in about half of the schools, there was one person with overall responsibility for co-ordinating the delivery of Key Skills throughout the school. The role of the Key Skills co-ordinator was seen as to 'make Key Skills a whole school thing', and to draw up strategies and plans for delivering Key Skills.
- **Teachers and tutors:** teachers and tutors in the schools surveyed had varying amounts of involvement in Key Skills depending upon the initiatives which had been introduced. In many schools it was only GNVQ, PSE and tutor staff who had been involved so far. Heads of faculty were beginning to co-ordinate the integration of Key Skills into schemes of work in some schools.
- **Other actors:** involved in Key Skills were employers, parents, Learning Partnership West and the LEAs.

Perceptions of Key Skills

Teachers and tutors

Attitudes among staff towards Key Skills, and knowledge about them, vary considerably both within and across schools. Some staff, particularly those involved in GNVQ or initiatives such as Compact 2000, were reported to be enthusiastic and committed to Key Skills. However, the two main difficulties schools were encountering were a feeling of initiative overload and a lack of time to devote to Key Skills. In some cases, there was also thought to be a lack of staff ability in the Key Skill areas themselves.

Students

Students surveyed appeared to understand the value of Key Skills and were receptive and interested in them. However, within some GNVQ subject areas, there was some difficulty in getting students to appreciate the relevance of certain Key Skills. For example, convincing students of the value of application of number for an art and design GNVQ proved particularly difficult.

Equipping schools to deliver Key Skills

Schools were building up their expertise to deliver Key Skills through a variety of methods. In terms of staff training, there appeared to be a mixture of formal and informal methods used. However, budgets for staff training were clearly limited. Key Skills were generally launched at events, often through INSET. Some external training had also been used, for example, D32 and D33 assessor training. Schools were very positive about the conferences, materials and support supplied by Learning Partnership West. Expertise is also being built up through the sharing of experience within schools, and to a limited extent across schools.

Delivery of Key Skills in practice

Learning experiences which contribute most to the development of Key Skills

Respondents were asked to provide examples of successful and unsuccessful activities and learning experiences for the development of Key Skills. Drawing from these responses, the learning experiences which appear to contribute most to the development of Key Skills are those which are:

- relevant to the course of study
- timely, *ie* relevant to what students are studying at the time or are likely to be doing in the near future
- pitched at the right level
- explicit about Key Skills
- interesting
- those where linkages are made across the curriculum and across activities, and
- where feedback is provided.

Recording and assessing Key Skills

Key Skills are formally accredited by an external body in GNVQ, by the OCEAC examinations board for the Diploma of Achievement and by ASDAN, which has awarding body status, for the Youth Award. Key Skills are internally certificated within schools where Superskills programmes have been introduced or where Key Skills are being recorded in personal organisers or student profiles.

There was varying opinion, amongst our respondents in schools, as to whether the Key Skills should be externally accredited or not. Some schools felt they needed external accreditation to be of value, others were of the opinion that a piece of paper was not necessary. In some cases it was understood that the possession of Key Skills 'spoke for themselves', in that Key Skills improved the ability of young people to present themselves effectively.

Success factors and barriers which schools encounter in delivering Key Skills

We summarise in the table overleaf the factors which contribute to the success in delivering Key Skills, and the barriers and difficulties which schools have encountered.

Impact of Key Skills development on young people

Respondents had difficulty identifying the impact of Key Skills development on young people. This was because the initiatives are relatively new and it is difficult to separate the impact of Key Skills, for example, from the overall mode of learning in GNVQ. However, they were able to give some insights into the impact of Key Skills. These were in relation to:

- comparisons between GNVQ students who had worked on their Key Skills, and other students. In many cases GNVQ students were viewed as being more confident, committed, and directed. They were also thought to have better IT, communication and working with others skills, and in this respect were more employable.
- confidence: both young people and teaching staff felt Key Skills helped to boost confidence and self esteem. They were also thought to improve students':
    - employability
    - understanding of the world of work
    - ability to make informed career choices, and to
    - develop disciplines of recording and providing evidence.

Factors contributing to success and barriers which schools encounter in delivering Key Skills

Factors contributing to success	Barriers and problems encountered
Management of Key Skills: Key Skills co-ordinator: who is committed, understands the needs of employers and is empowered to develop the approach to Key Skills in the school. Supportive senior management team Key Skills management group	**Lack of resources:** both time and funding for: IT equipment, training for staff, time to map Key Skills across the curriculum, to identify the opportunities to cover the Key Skills, to evidence the Key Skills properly, to cover Compact 2000 programmes properly and administrative time for GNVQ, so teachers can teach. Schools do not see much likelihood of the necessary resources for Key Skills coming through.
Links with employers so that schools understand and are responsive to local labour market needs, employers can be involved in delivering Key Skills activities and provide work experience placements.	
Outlook of the school, eg vocationally oriented or community schools.	
User friendliness: Some schools had rewritten GNVQ Key Skills log books to simplify the language used and had produced their own Key Skills materials.	**User unfriendliness:** The language in GNVQ Key Skills units was felt to be complex and convoluted and particularly unsuitable for students involved in GNVQ Part 1 pilots.
	The inappropriate levels of Key Skills in GNVQ. In some subjects, eg health and social care, and art and design the level of the Key Skills was thought to be too high for some students. This was particularly the case for application of number and IT for GNVQ part 1.
Staff skills in the Key Skill areas and their understanding of the world of work.	**Lack of skills among some staff,** in the Key Skills themselves in order to be able to deliver and integrate them into subjects.
Staff commitment: persuade staff that Key Skills are happening anyway and that it is not just another new initiative.	**Staff attitudes** a sense of initiative overload. In some schools there was concern that the workload to integrate Key Skills would not be shared evenly between staff, with the more committed teachers doing the majority of the work on integrating and mapping Key Skills.
Collateral. All different parties involved: employers, schools and parents so that the messages students receive are consistent and the value of Key Skills are appreciated.	**Unclear messages from Government.** Some schools do not want to put too much time and effort into Key Skills until they know how Government sees Key Skills fitting into GCSE, 'A' level, higher education and lifetime learning.

Research with training providers

This section of the report presents findings from our research with training suppliers delivering Key Skills within their Modern Apprenticeship programmes in the former Avon area. It draws from our findings from discussions with ten training suppliers and some of their Modern Apprenticeship trainees. A questionnaire was distributed to young people in eight of the training organisations. The training suppliers visited covered a wide range of occupational areas and included two colleges and two employers with direct contracts with SkillsLink West to deliver Modern Apprenticeships.

Overall approach to delivering Key Skills

Objectives of delivering Key Skills

The training suppliers we visited generally recognised the value of delivering Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeship programmes. Typically, the objective of delivering Key Skills was viewed as being to equip trainees with the skills employers require and to ensure employers get a rounded person in the workplace who can communicate. The majority of our respondents recognised that the Key Skills are the generic skills which underpin the Modern Apprenticeship. However, some of the tutors and trainees in certain occupational areas felt that some of the Key Skills were less relevant than others. It appeared that there was a lack of appreciation that the purpose of delivering the Key Skills in the training programmes is to prepare trainees for roles they may progress to in future.

Approaches to delivering Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeship programmes

The main difference in approach to the Key Skills is whether they are integrated into training, assignments and assessment activities for the NVQ or 'bolted on' as a separate activity. It is now generally agreed that the most effective way of delivering Key Skills is to integrate them into the programme and most suppliers we spoke to were moving towards this approach.

The extent to which Key Skills can be integrated appears to depend upon a number of factors which include:

- the opportunities available to gather Key Skills evidence in the workplace
- the tutor's or assessor's understanding of Key Skills
- the time available, *ie* one-to-one time with the training supplier to identify opportunities for assignments and assessments
- guidance from the awarding body
- the timing of the introduction of the Key Skills
- support from the employer.

Equipping tutors and assessors to deliver Key Skills

Tutors and assessors reported that when Key Skills were first introduced to Modern Apprenticeships, there was a lot of concern about them. Many staff did not feel confident about their own Key Skills and their ability to deliver them. The Key Skills were also seen as presenting a lot of extra work. However, it now appears that expertise in delivering the Key Skills has been built up and attitudes towards them are changing.

Employers' role in the delivery of Key Skills

Broadly our training suppliers fell equally into two categories:

- those who felt employers of Modern Apprentices had a good understanding and were supportive of Key Skills, and
- those who complained that employers did not understand and were not supportive in providing opportunities for developing and assessing these skills.

Trainees attitudes towards and understanding of Key Skills

Most trainees we spoke to did appreciate the value of their Key Skills development and training. Those with a better understanding of the relevance of Key Skills were those who had progressed further in their training programme, done more work on their Key Skills, and those whose Key Skills training and assessment had been integrated with the NVQ.

Delivering Key Skills in practice

Activities and assignments for developing and assessing Key Skills

In general the projects or assignments described to us fell into three categories:

- naturally occurring events at work
- extended or adapted naturally occurring events, and
- relevant simulations or realistic projects.

Factors which contribute to effective delivery of Key Skills

In summary, examples of effective practice were those where:

- trainees are recruited well
- the Key Skills are introduced at an early stage
- a range of learning experiences and assessment activities are used to suit the needs or the trainee and employer. Activities which work best are those which are relevant to the job.
- training suppliers have built up expertise and materials to support the delivery of Key Skills
- the programme puts the trainee in charge of their own learning, and
- the trainee has the full support of their employer.

Barriers and problems which training suppliers encounter in delivering Key Skills

In many cases training suppliers had encountered difficulties or barriers to delivering Key Skills effectively, these included:

- lack of skills amongst new trainees
- lack of skills amongst staff and assessors
- difficulties identifying opportunities to deliver the Key Skills
- lack of support from employers
- insufficient time
- difficulties with interpreting the language of Key Skills, and a
- lack of funding.

Impact of Key Skills delivery in Modern Apprenticeships

Again respondents had difficulty identifying the impact of Key Skills development on young people. However, they were able to give some insights into the impact of Key Skills. These were:

- increased confidence and motivation
- raised awareness of the Key Skills young people have, and
- improved personal effectiveness.

What more could be done to support Key Skills development

Suppliers were asked what more they considered could be done to support the delivery of Key Skills in training programmes. Responses were:

- Support and training for tutors and trainers of Key Skills in the Key Skills themselves and in how to deliver them.
- Raising awareness of employers of the importance of Key Skills to try to encourage greater support from employers, was seen as important, as well as
- Educating young people of the long term benefits of Key Skills, and
- More time and resources to better enable suppliers to bring young recruits up to the levels required of them within the Key Skills elements.

Research with employers

This section of the reports presents our research with employers with Modern Apprenticeship trainees or otherwise involved in developing Key Skills in young recruits in the former Avon area. It draws from our findings from discussions with 22 employer representatives. The employers interviewed covered a wide range of size bands, industrial sectors and occupational areas, and included three with direct contracts with SkillsLink West to deliver Modern Apprenticeships.

Employers' demand for Key Skills

Various national studies have drawn attention to the widespread demand among employers for communication and personal skills, and literacy and numeracy. Although employers we surveyed had not always come across the term 'Key Skills', when questioned about each skill area, the importance of these skills was clearly recognised. Overall, communication skills were seen as the most important, followed by working with others and improving own learning and performance. Problem solving, IT, and application of number, were considered less important in certain occupations than others.

Communication skills were considered very important for all occupations, but especially so for administration, care, catering, hairdressing and retail, and in roles where employees were dealing directly with the public, and internal and external customers. Respondents generally recognised that communication was becoming increasingly important in all sectors, as a result of more emphasis being placed upon providing a service. The relative importance of different modes of communication varied by occupational area. For instance in administration, all types of communicating were considered important, including speaking on the telephone, written correspondence, and face-to-face communication. In hairdressing, there was reported to be a greater requirement for oral communication skills than written. Nevertheless, written communication skills were thought to be needed for those who progress into training or managerial roles in all occupations.

- Of all the Key Skills, **application of number** skills were seen as being the most occupationally specific, being important in some jobs but not as important in others. Although still considered 'fairly important', application of number was viewed as the least important of the five Key Skills by the majority of respondents. However, respondents in engineering, retailing and the travel industry ranked this Key Skill very highly. It was also thought that application of number skills became more important as employees progressed into supervisory or managerial roles, *ie* those that Modern Apprentices might be expected to be promoted to.
- The level of **IT skills** demanded is clearly related to the degree to which an organisation is computerised, and again with this Key Skill we came across some quite wide variation in the importance employers placed on it. There was also considerable variation according to occupational area. Employers with trainees in administrative roles, for example, had a much greater demand for this Key Skill than those

employing care assistants. Again, at managerial level, the breadth and level of skill required is much higher for all occupational areas. Employers have also noted that although the level of IT skills required by many organisations is currently at a fairly basic level, this will not necessarily be the case in future.

- Employer respondents in all sectors and with trainees in all occupational areas felt that **working with others** and team working skills were one of the most important Key Skill areas. Work is frequently organised around some form of team input, and employers are expecting employees to take more responsibility in their jobs. There are clear trends towards a requirement for individuals to help each other, be more flexible and help others out during peaks of workload. Employees in all occupations are also increasingly required to make links across organisations, understand different roles, and how they fit into the overall plan.
- Employers included in the WESTEC survey also considered the **improving own learning** Key Skill to be one of the most important of the six. Employers noted that those employees who wanted to progress would need to take responsibility for their own work and career. Employers with Modern Apprentices required young trainees to show initiative, be motivated to learn ,and be self directed in their own learning.
- The employers generally considered **problem solving** to be less important than some of the other Key Skills, but there was some variation by occupational area. In many occupations, at a more junior level, it was thought that young people would not be expected to have this skill because there would always be someone on hand to help. However, in some occupations such as engineering, and at more senior levels, this was considered an important skill.
- **Key Skills versus other skills:** to a large extent, Key Skills were seen as the skills which underpinned more occupation specific skills. In some sectors, such as engineering, employers felt that other skills were equally important, such as technical ability, but in others it was felt that other skills could be trained if an individual had the Key Skills. Other skills and attributes rated as important by respondents included: initiative, common sense, a positive attitude to work, honesty, reliability, technical skills and personal hygiene.

Employers' satisfaction with the Key Skills of young applicants

Recruiters often criticise the abilities of young people, especially new entrants to the labour market. The level of employers' satisfaction with the Key Skills in our survey ranged from those who were largely dissatisfied, those who felt that the Key Skills were very variable, to those who thought they were very good. This level of satisfaction appears to vary according to occupational area, to be influenced by the attractiveness of the employment opportunities they were offering, and the extent to which they were experiencing recruitment difficulties:

- **Communication** skills were seen to be the main problem area. Many employers were critical of both written and oral communication skills of young people. In some cases, employers noted a deficiency of basic literacy skills.
- In relation to **application of number**, satisfaction levels were more varied. Where employers felt this Key Skill was very important, employers were more likely to be dissatisfied with the supply. Again it was basic numeracy skills which were sometimes found to be lacking.
- Employers were, in general, more satisfied with young people's **IT skills** than the other Key Skills. Employers felt that young people seemed to have worked on IT at school.
- **Working with others** skills were thought by some employers to be lacking among young people. However, others felt that they would not expect young applicants to have developed skills in this area.
- **Improving own learning and performance**: many respondents commented that young people lacked motivation, were short-sighted, were driven by wages, and lived for now rather than looking to the future. It was noted, though, that those individuals who had started working towards NVQs were more motivated and better able to manage their own learning.
- In general, **problem solving** was seen as the weakest of the Key Skills of young people, but on the whole this was not an issue for employers, as expectations were low.
- **Other skills gaps** identified in our survey by some respondents generally related to attitude.

Employers' perceptions of how well education develops the Key Skills

- Of all the Key Skills, IT was the one which employers felt young people developed most in school.
- Employers were of the opinion that young people entering employment from colleges were more likely to have had previous Key Skills training.
- It was thought that some young people had been able to develop their Key Skills on work experience placements.
- Key Skills were seen as not being high profile enough in schools.
- Employers reported that there was a lack of continuity between the development of the Key Skills in school and the application of these in work.

- Generally there was a perception that there was little Key Skills training going on in schools, and that schools were not doing enough to prepare young people for the real world.

Development of Key Skills

- Few of the employers we surveyed were involved in specific formal Key Skills training, but the majority were involved, to some extent, with general training of their young people, either formally or informally.
- Employers used a range of approaches to training, but the most common method was a combination of on-the-job or in-house training, with off-site, college based training.
- Of the training described, some was specifically tailored to developing Key Skills and this was in the main delivered by training suppliers, or by employers where they had a direct contract with SkillsLink West. Most employers, whilst not specifically focusing on Key Skills, were providing training in competencies which closely matched the Key Skills.

Employers' views on the most effective approaches to developing Key Skills

Employers felt that in order to develop Key Skills in young people:

- There should be a mixture of formal off-the-job training, informal and formal in-house or on-the-job training, and work experience. The skills being developed on-the-job should reinforce or build upon the training delivered by an external training supplier.
- Off-the-job training should be relevant to the individual's work and related to real life situations.
- There should be constant and on-going training.
- There should be learning by example, or work shadowing.
- Support should be provided for trainees.
- All those involved in the training should understand the reasons for developing the Key Skills.

Reflecting our training supplier respondents' views, those employers who had a direct contract with the TEC for delivering Modern Apprenticeships tended to take an integrated approach to developing Key Skills in the programme, rather than 'bolted on' as a separate activity.

Barriers and problems which employers encounter in developing the Key Skills

Employers identified a number of different barriers or potential barriers to developing skills in young people. These included:

- lack of skills among trainees and attitude problems
- difficulties with cross-referencing Key Skills with the NVQ in the Modern Apprenticeship programme
- difficulties interpreting the jargon of the NVQ and the Key Skills
- lack of understanding among staff of the relevance of the Key Skills
- excessive demand of the Key Skills (felt by some employers), and
- problems experienced by some with training suppliers.

Assessment of Key Skills

On recruitment

The majority of our employer respondents did not formally assess Key Skills of potential, and new recruits. However, it would seem that many of the employers were assessing skills which are very similar to some or all of the Key Skills, during the recruitment process, but did not use the Key Skill terminology. The most commonly used indicators to informally (*ie* not under the Key Skill banner) assess Key Skill ability during the recruitment process were: performance during a selection interview, a review of formal qualifications gained, and a trial period in the job. Very few were aware of, or looked at, National Records of Achievement, or the Key Skills elements of GNVQ.

During training

Again, as with recruitment, many of the employers approached assessed the development Key Skills of their young employees during their training, but not formally under the Key Skills banner. These assessment methods ranged from personal development plans, regular reviews with line managers, to generally keep an eye on individuals on a day-to-day basis.

Impact of Key Skills development

Most employers felt that the difference between young employees with strong Key Skills and those with weaker abilities in these areas was noticeable. Notable differences were generally centred around greater ability and better performance. Those with Key Skills were viewed as:

- achievers
- having the ability to work using their own initiative
- having a 'can do' attitude and being more dynamic
- having higher standards
- likely to progress more rapidly
- better at providing a good service to customers
- having greater confidence, and
- more enthusiastic in their jobs.

Employers also tended to agree that Key Skills were transferable and were important in enabling people to progress.

1. Introduction

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) was commissioned by The Western Training and Enterprise Council (WESTEC) to undertake research to assess the impact of Key Skills development on young people. WESTEC, together with its partner organisation Learning Partnership West, have developed a range of initiatives to promote the development of key skills among young people. The Key Skills are: communication, application of number, IT, working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving. The aim of the study was to explore factors which contribute the most effectively to the development of Key Skills, and to provide insights which will influence future developments. It should be noted at the outset of this report that WESTEC's Key Skill related activities are fast changing, and the situation may have changed several instances since the time the fieldwork for the research was undertaken.

1.1 Research objectives

There are three main objectives to this research:

1. To understand how an emphasis on the acquisition of Key Skills benefits young people, and determine how such benefits can be measured. In particular:
    - Which learning experiences contribute most to the development of Key Skills?
    - How are student experiences in the acquisition and use of Key Skills recorded?
    - How important, given the expense, is formal recognition of achievements in Key Skills to students?
    - Are those young people who have undergone planned Key Skills development more capable than others who have not, and in what ways?
    - In particular, does Key Skills training help young people in their career decision making process?
    - From a teacher's perspective, how adequately are they briefed to deliver Key Skills training? Do they use special materials?

2. To identify and clarify the ways in which different training suppliers and employers are effectively developing and delivering Key Skills within the Modern Apprenticeship framework within the former Avon area. In particular:
   - To what extent are Key Skills 'bolted-on' or 'integrated' into existing NVQ units, and which of these approaches is the most effective?
   - Are there examples of effective practice in Key Skills delivery, *eg* by employers, and how could these be applied elsewhere?
   - What are the barriers and problems which suppliers and employers encounter in developing Key Skills? What encourages them to get involved and persevere?
   - What more could be done to complement existing activity?
3. To assess the extent to which education in Key Skills is smoothly progressed by experiences in further education, training and employment routes. In particular:
   - How well do the schemes operated by schools, colleges, training suppliers and employers complement each other?
   - What works well?
   - How might the transitions be improved?

1.2 What are Key Skills?

Key (previously Core) Skills are a set of six skills which have been identified as underlying good performance in the labour market, now and in the future. They can be divided into two broad groups:

- **communication, the use of numbers and IT** — these build on basic skills learnt through education, and are developed through their application in the workplace
- **working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving** — these are skills which are needed to operate effectively in the workplace.

Concerns about poor levels of skill among the British workforce and perceptions of a mismatch between the competencies of young people and those required by employers have been identified. A range of studies have illustrated concern among employers about the skills of young people entering the workforce from school, college and university. This has fuelled a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the overall abilities of the workforce, including those already in it and people entering at a variety of educational levels.

1.3 Research methods

The overall approach to the research was to collect information from:

- teachers and careers staff in 20 schools, for 14 to 18 year olds
- trainers and assessors in training suppliers involved in Modern Apprenticeships; ten training suppliers were included
- young people within each of the schools, colleges and training suppliers surveyed
- 25 employers involved in Modern Apprenticeships and other ways of developing Key Skills.

The methods of data collection included in-depth interviews and focus groups and a postal questionnaire of young people.

1.4 Structure of the report

This report presents findings from our research within schools, training suppliers and employers. It is divided into three sections.

Section 1: Schools

- Chapter 2 considers the approaches schools are taking to delivering Key Skills and the initiatives they are involved in.
- Chapter 3 looks at who is involved in delivering Key Skills and the attitudes of staff and pupils towards Key Skills. It also discusses the training and support schools have drawn upon to equip themselves to deliver Key Skills.
- Chapter 4 considers how Key Skills are being delivered in practice, and the types of learning activities which have proved to be most effective. We also discuss the impact of Key Skills development.

Section 2: Training suppliers

- Chapter 5 considers the overall approach training suppliers have taken to delivering Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeship programmes.
- Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the delivery of Key Skills in these programmes in practice.

Section 3: Employers

- Chapter 7 considers employers' perceptions of Key Skills, the importance they place on these skills, the extent to which they are satisfied with the Key Skills of young recruits, and their views on transitions from education to employment.

- Chapter 8 provides a discussion of employers' approaches to developing and assessing young people's Key Skills.

Conclusions

- Chapter 9 identifies issues arising from the research for discussion.

2. Schools' Approaches to Delivery of Key Skills

This section of the report considers the delivery of Key Skills in schools.

The specific objectives of this study in relation to schools were to examine:

- Which organised (or unscheduled) learning experiences contribute most to the development of Key Skills?
- How are student experiences in the acquisition and use of Key Skills recorded, for different age groups, and at different stages?
- How important, given the expense, is formal recognition of achievements in Key Skills to pre-16 students?
- Are those young people who have undergone planned Key Skills development more capable than others who have not? In what ways, and is this difference perceived by teachers?
- In particular, are young people who have been trained in Key Skills more open minded about future career choices; does it help in their career decision making process?
- From a teacher's perspective, how adequately are they briefed to deliver Key Skills training? Do they use special materials?

The aim of the research was to focus upon students aged between 14 and 18, but those aged from 11 were also included in the survey.

This section of the report is divided into three chapters. In order to provide context to some of the issues, we begin this chapter by looking at the nature of the schools surveyed, and respondents' views on the objectives and value of introducing Key Skills initiatives into schools. We then detail what schools are doing on Key Skills and discuss the approaches they are taking to introducing Key Skills initiatives. In the following chapter we discuss the actors involved in Key Skills, their attitudes towards Key Skills and how schools are equipping themselves to deliver Key Skills. The final chapter considers how Key Skills are being delivered in practice, the learning experiences and activities used, assessment and recording of the skills, and the impact of Key Skills development.

2.1 The school survey

2.1.1 The fieldwork

The school fieldwork was conducted in 20 schools, and visits took place between November 1997 and March 1998. Half of these visits were conducted during the Autumn term 1997 and the other half during Spring 1998. Part of the fieldwork was delayed because on first contacting the schools in October 1997, it was found that many had only recently introduced Key Skills. It was therefore felt that the fieldwork should be conducted as late as possible to ensure that schools were more able to comment on Key Skills and more meaningful findings were gathered.

Up to one full day was spent in each of the schools visited. In all schools we spoke to a range of staff, including a member of the senior management team, and in many cases the headteacher. The types of staff we met included a member of staff responsible for delivering Key Skills. In some cases, this would be a co-ordinator for Key Skills for the whole school, GNVQ subject teachers, PSE teachers and tutors. In most of the schools, we also spoke to groups of young people, and in some schools up to four such focus groups were conducted. These incorporated a wide variety of young people, according to year (participants ranged from Year 7 to Year 13), qualifications they were working towards, and Key Skills initiatives they were involved in. However, some schools felt it was inappropriate for us to talk to young people, for example, schools which had not yet embarked upon explicitly delivering Key Skills. In 15 schools we distributed short questionnaires to young people to elicit their views on the importance of Key Skills, opportunities they had had to develop their Key Skills, and their confidence in each of the skill areas.

2.1.2 The characteristics of the schools surveyed

The sample of 20 schools surveyed included a range of schools in terms of geographic location, type of school, age range, performance in terms of students' achievements in GCSE, courses offered and initiatives the schools were involved in.

- **Geographic location.** The schools were divided fairly evenly between the four unitary authority areas in the former Avon area. They ranged from those in inner city areas to rural locations. Half were in towns or urban areas other than the two major cities of Bath and Bristol.
- **Type of school.** The sample included one special school and one independent school. Four of the schools were community schools and all except one were mixed. In terms of size, approximately one-quarter had less than 100 students aged 15 on the roll, more than half had between 100 and 200, and in a further quarter there were more than 200 students in this age group (DfEE, 1996).

- **Age range.** Only two of the participating schools did not offer post-16 education.
- **Performance**, in terms of students' achievements in GCSE, provides some indication of the nature of the schools we surveyed. The LEA maintained schools ranged from one school with less than 20 per cent of students in the GCSE age group achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C in 1996 (DfEE 1997) to 58 per cent achieving these grades.
- **Courses offered and initiatives** the schools were involved in:
  - Three-quarters of the schools offered GNVQ courses and one-quarter were involved in the GNVQ Part 1 pilot.
  - More than half ran the Compact 2000 programme or the ASDAN Youth Award Scheme for pre-16 students.
  - In two schools post-16 students were studying for the OCEAC Diploma of Achievement.
  - Three schools had launched the Superskills profile in Autumn 1997, and a further three were planning to do so in the next academic year.
  - Four of the schools were involved in the pilot for ProFile (the new 'National Record of Achievement').
  - Five were working towards Investors in Careers, four had achieved the Investors in People (IiP) award and half of all the schools were working towards IiP.

2.1.3 The questionnaire survey of students

A four page questionnaire was distributed to students in 15 schools. Thirty questionnaires were sent out to each school (a total of 450) and 190 were returned. This represents a response rate of 42 per cent. The survey was conducted during the second half of the Spring term of 1998. The questionnaire was distributed and collected through teaching staff. IES advised each school on the groups of young people who should complete the questionnaire. They were distributed mostly to young people who had started working on their Key Skills, or had been involved in a programme or qualification covering Key Skills such as GNVQ. However, the sample did include some students who had done no work on Key Skills explicitly and one school who had so far not started on Key Skills at all.

Our sample is unlikely to be representative of all students in schools in the former Avon area. However, the aim of collecting the data was to provide some indication on students' views on Key Skills. The characteristics of the sample were:

- fifty-nine per cent female and 41 per cent male.
- ninety-five per cent white, three per cent Asian and two per cent Black-Caribbean/Black African.

- year:
    - Year 10: 13 per cent
    - Year 11: 16 per cent
    - Year 12: 49 per cent, and
    - Year 13: 18 per cent
    - Four per cent of the sample were in Year 9, although it was not intended to survey this age group.
- twenty-nine per cent of the respondents were studying for GCSE, 41 per cent 'A' levels and 44 per cent GNVQ.

2.2 Objectives of Key Skills initiatives in schools

Respondents in schools (teaching staff and senior managers) were asked what was the objective of introducing Key Skills programmes or initiatives into schools. The most common responses related to improving the employability of young people and equipping them as effective learners. At all the schools we visited there appeared to be a commitment to, and an understanding of, the Key Skills from the headteacher and the senior management team. This was also the case where the school had not got Key Skills initiatives under way as yet, but were planning Key Skills programmes to be launched in the near future. In all schools, we were told that the drive to introduce Key Skills generally came from 'the top', *ie* senior management. The impetus for introducing Key Skill was identified as coming from outside the school, *ie* as a response to demand from employers and from the Local Education Authority.

> *'Key Skills is a buzz word we are reminded of constantly from the LEA.'*

A number of the schools talked about the proactive role of Learning Partnership West (LPW) in Key Skills. The support LPW provided had clearly provided encouragement for introducing Key Skills. Approximately half of the schools spontaneously mentioned this support from LPW. Many of those that did not mention this were those which had had Key Skills or Core Skills programmes in place for some time.

We outline the respondents' views on the objectives of introducing Key Skills initiatives into schools in the following sections.

2.2.1 Employability

Our respondents generally recognised that the Key Skills were the skills that employers wanted. Schools commonly talked about Key Skills being the transferable skills needed for new types of work or within a flexible labour market. It was felt that certain Key Skills required by employers were not covered in the curriculum. As one respondent noted:

> *'Key Skills will create a generation of business people . . . fitting in with the plans of the Labour Government . . . tying education into employment.'*

Another respondent was aware of skills shortages in their local labour market. The development of Key Skills in this particular school was seen as crucial in meeting the demands of employers. It was reported that anecdotal evidence suggested that employers were not particularly comfortable with GCSEs as a way of differentiating between candidates. Key Skills were viewed as something that employers increasingly understood with the introduction of NVQs and GNVQs. Development of the Key Skills were thus considered important for young people to develop, in order to enhance their employment prospects, and their ability to present themselves effectively to prospective employers. In particular, Key Skills were seen as helping young people write CVs, complete application forms and be more adaptable.

> *'Young people should develop Key Skills alongside academic qualifications so they can say "here I am, this is what I've developed and this is how I can prove it".'*

Examples of responses from GNVQ co-ordinators were:

> *'At the end of the day, we would hope that Key Skills will make the pupils more employable.'*

> *'The GNVQ gives pupils breadth and balance. They can sell themselves to prospective employers which they can't do with academic qualifications on their own.'*

Key Skills were seen as especially important for young people with special educational needs. It was reported that for students who did not achieve academic qualifications, these transferable skills helped prepare them for the outside world and provide a better chance of functioning in the workplace. Furthermore, it was not just skills for the workplace that Key Skills initiatives were seen as developing, but life skills in general.

2.2.2 To equip young people as effective learners and provide a broader education

There was an understanding within schools that the Key Skills were required to equip young people as effective lifelong learners. It was also noted that they were the skills required across the curriculum, and in this respect Key Skills initiatives were seen as a vehicle for providing a broader education.

Some respondents described subject based education as narrow, and criticised the 'slot mentality' in schools which can mean that few connections are made across the curriculum. It was felt that Key Skills initiatives would encourage teaching staff and students to move away from this narrow subject based education, and result in more cross curricular links. As one respondent noted, Key Skills encouraged students to think that application of number for example, was not just covered in the maths classroom, but that these skills were needed in other situations. The same could be said for the other Key Skills.

One school talked about some very 'bright' students who had left the school with exceptional exam results but with poor Key Skills. It was noted that they were unable to communicate effectively. In this respect staff felt they 'had failed them' and the Key Skills initiative was seen as something to address this issue. Another school delivering the Diploma of Achievement noted:

> *'Without the Diploma of Achievement, some 'A' level students would go to university having never done a presentation.'*

2.2.3 Recognition of the young people's skills

Apart from the main benefits of Key Skills in terms of employability, developing life skills and equipping young people as effective learners, respondents noted that Key Skills had value in a number of other respects. In particular, focusing upon Key Skills was seen as having value in terms of recognising skills which would not necessarily be identified in academic achievements. One respondent noted that accrediting Key Skills had the effect of bolstering the confidence of a particular group of students. These were described as those with organisational ability, who work hard but do not necessarily get high grades in academic exams.

> *'In this school the kids here are very street wise. They don't like academic work but they can communicate very well and are good at getting on with people.'*

Another school saw Key Skills initiatives as providing an opportunity for young people to enhance the latent skills they already had in these areas. It was thought that the Key Skills helped young people to appreciate that they did have skills and could do things, and in this way helped boost self esteem and confidence.

2.2.4 Future requirements of GCSE, 'A' level, UCAS and the new NRA

Respondents were aware that Key Skills would almost certainly be built into the assessment framework of the new 'A' and 'AS' syllabus and would be an element of the UCAS form. Key Skills will also feature in the new 'National Record of Achievement' and, as outlined above, a number of schools were involved in the pilots for this. One respondent felt that any change in the GCSE syllabus in the future would also mean an explicit integration of Key Skills. Another was under the impression that Key Skills would become a mandatory and assessed part of the national curriculum. Many of the schools had already introduced Key Skills, to pre-empt these likely developments and requirements for them to do so in the future. Respondents reported that they wanted to 'get ahead of the game', so they would be prepared for these changes.

However, for one school in particular, these likely changes were having the opposite effect. This school was reluctant to move forward on Key Skills before they were clear about what the requirements would be.

2.2.5 GNVQ

The accreditation of the communication, application of number and IT Key Skills are compulsory in GNVQ courses. In some cases the response from GNVQ teachers to our question on the objective of delivering Key Skills was 'because we have to'. However, schools generally did see the benefit of Key Skills in GNVQ and understood that the whole mode of learning in GNVQ developed Key Skills. In some schools, the perceived benefits of including Key Skills in GNVQ appeared to have provided the impetus for introducing Key Skills in other parts of the school.

> *'GNVQs were the trigger to Key Skills in the school.'*

2.2.6 To address deficiency of basic skills

A number of the schools visited were currently focusing on basic skills programmes. Sometimes the staff involved with Key Skills were also those responsible for teaching basic skills. In most cases, the Key Skills were seen as building upon the basic skills. One school was focusing upon a literacy and numeracy plan at the time of the survey and Key Skills was to build upon this. However, some of the schools mentioned Key Skills initiatives as a means of addressing a lack of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. For example, one respondent felt that the objective of Key Skills was to improve literacy. This indicates that in some schools there may be some confusion about the difference between basic skills and Key Skills.

2.3 What are schools doing on Key Skills?

There was wide variation in our sample in terms of the approach schools were taking to Key Skills, the initiatives they were introducing and how far developed these were at the time of the survey. Schools clearly took the approach which was most appropriate for their own needs, the nature of the school, and its students. One of the research specifications for this project was that the sample of schools should include both schools with fully integrated Key Skills programmes and those having a very piecemeal approach.

On first approaching schools to invite them to participate in the survey during the Autumn term of 1997, it was found that most schools had only very recently introduced Key Skills and they were much less advanced in this respect than was originally expected. Some schools had an overall plan for Key Skills throughout the school, others had not really got Key Skills under way as yet, other than for GNVQ students. In these schools, the benefits of being explicit about Key Skills had been recognised and schools were beginning to plan the launching of Key Skills programmes in the next academic year.

The Key Skills were being delivered in schools through a range of programmes and initiatives at different Key Stages. In summary these were:

- **Key Stage 3**: Superskills, extra-curricular activities such as activities in PSE, activities weeks and school camp.
- **Key Stage 4**: ASDAN Youth Award Scheme, Compact 2000, GNVQ Part 1 pilots, personal profiling and organisers for signing off Key Skills, records of achievement, action planning and careers lessons within PSE and pre-16 work experience.
- **Post-16**: GNVQ, GNVQ Key Skills units for 'A' and 'AS' level students, CLAIT, the Diploma of Achievement, enrichment activities and general studies.

Table 2:1 shows the qualifications and programmes which young people responding to the questionnaire survey were working towards. This provides an indication of the initiatives being run in the schools. The questionnaire findings also showed that respondents were recording Key Skills in records of achievement, work experience assessments, student profiles or planners, Compact 2000 modules, and a Key Skills pack developed by Royal Sun Alliance. (We discuss these assessment and recording methods in Chapter 4.)

In most schools which had embarked upon explicitly delivering Key Skills, it was apparent that Key Skills were being delivered through a number of disparate or disintegrated programmes at different stages or years within the school. No progression had been built into the programmes as yet, and there was little sense

Table 2:1 Qualifications and programmes covering Key Skills which young people were working towards (per cent)

Qualifications and programmes	All	Year	
		Key Stage 4	Post-16
GNVQ Foundation	10	27	2
GNVQ Intermediate	14	2	20
GNVQ Advanced	21	–	30
Compact 2000 Programme	3	9	–
Diploma of Achievement	18	–	26
N = whole student sample (multiple responses allowed)	190	55	127

Source: IES Survey

of young people building on the Key Skills they had learnt in earlier years.

Apart from the Key Skills being delivered explicitly through specific programmes, it was generally felt that most of the Key Skills were covered in the curriculum anyway. Some schools were beginning to be explicit about, map and link the Key Skills across the curriculum, and integrate them into schemes of work across the school. This was particularly the case in IT, which was taught, used and assessed in a range of subjects in some schools. It was felt that the Key Skills were also covered implicitly through activities like Outward Bound. Another common view was that Key Skills were not anything new and had been delivered in a number ways over the years under different headings. The only difference now was that schools were being explicit about the importance of Key Skills, and young people were being made aware of them. In line with this, the mode of introducing Key Skills was typically viewed as 'evolution not revolution'.

> *'We do lots of things which are Key Skills but we don't call them Key Skills.'*

In the following sections we consider in more detail the programmes through which Key Skills were being delivered in the three Key Stages.

2.3.1 Key Stage 3

Superskills

We visited four schools which had introduced the Learning Partnership West Superskills initiative during the academic year of 1997/98, and a further three who planned to do so in September 1998. Superskills is a skills profile for use with 11 to 14 year olds. Schools identify a set of Key Skills they want each year group to achieve. The skills are recorded on a profile which is managed by the pupils. Different departments take responsibility for teaching and assessing the skills. Pupils receive evidence stickers and certificates to recognise achievement. For example, they can:

- use Personal Journal to record homework on daily basis
- organise books and bring in correct ones each day
- understand that listening is a skill and can listen when others are speaking
- measure accurately in cm and/or mm to draw a simple diagram
- label a diagram accurately
- use a mouse in the correct manner to load a computer programme and save work in a Windows environment
- act as a member of a group in completing a task.

The Superskills initiative was introduced with the support and guidance of Learning Partnership West. The Superskills covered and the programme in general were adapted from the Learning Partnership West Superskills Profile. (Learning Partnership West, 1996). Superskills were identified in school organisers or diaries and signed off both by teachers or tutors, when it was thought the skill had been demonstrated. All of the programmes were similar in that when each of the Superskills had been signed off twice, students were awarded a certificate. To some extent, feedback and action planning were built into the programme. In one school, the initiative was to be used to tighten up and refocus the action planning and goal setting already going on in the school. In another, parents had been successfully involved in the action planning process.

It was clear that the schools were at the very early stages with this initiative, and some 'teething' difficulties were being experienced (discussed in Chapter 4). The programmes discussed were for Years 7 and 8, but so far in some schools they had only been introduced in Year 7. In the next academic year, an element of progression was to be built in, whereby the current Year 7 students will build upon their Superskills in Year 8. The Superskills initiative was seen as a way of getting students thinking about Key Skills at an early stage and was a good introduction to Key Skills. However, one of the respondents reported that the skills were 'a bit simple'.

Other programmes

Respondents identified other opportunities for Key Skills development including in one school, an activities week in Year 9 on the world of work. Employers visited the school and gave individual feedback. Other activities mentioned were the Year 7 camp, and trips and visits which occur across the curriculum. As one respondent who had an inclusive and broad perspective on Key Skills said:

> *'All these activities have a contributory factor to the development of Key Skills. The intensity of it is important to develop confidence and to be able to apply these skills. By Year 10 they are confident, reasoning youngsters who are able to investigate and research issues, can express their views and test their views against each other.'*

Although not explicitly under the Key Skills banner, a few of the schools taught IT to all students in Years 7 and 8.

2.3.2 Key Stage 4

ASDAN and Compact 2000

The two main formal programmes through which Key Skills were delivered in Years 10 and 11 were the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Youth Award

Scheme, and Learning Partnership West's Compact 2000 initiative. For both these programmes students worked on projects which developed Key Skills. Examples of the types of learning activities used are discussed in Chapter 4.

Compact 2000 was introduced by Learning Partnership West to provide a framework for careers education and guidance (CEG) in 1995 (Beck and Thorn, 1997). It aims to support the CEG process by enabling young people to demonstrate the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes required for making successful transitions from one learning context to another, and to deliver the Key Skills pre-16. Students work on four modules: personal development, self and work, careers research, and managing transitions. In the schools involved in Compact 2000, the opportunities to develop Key Skills were identified using the Learning Partnership West Compact 2000 Key Skills at the back of this report. Students working on the Compact 2000 can get a LPW certificate and claim credit towards the ASDAN Youth Award.

For the Youth Award Scheme students were working towards the ASDAN external awards. The NCVQ Key Skills units form the basis of the Award Scheme assessment, verification and certification. ASDAN has been granted awarding body status by NCVQ for Key Skills Levels 1 to 3.

Almost three-quarters of our sample were running one or both of these programmes. These were delivered during PSE classes, but it appears that there was only a relatively short amount of timetabled time devoted to the programmes. For example, in one school, 16 hours of PSE time was spent on Compact 2000. Most of the schools participating in Compact 2000 were positive about the initiative, although some saw it as a tick box exercise with little standard assessment. We also came across some criticism of ASDAN, as one respondent put it:

> *'Kids don't fall for pseudo qualifications, it's a bit wishy washy.'*

Records of achievement and school planners

Some of the schools were recording Key Skills in records of achievement or school planners in Years 10 and 11. This generally involved some target setting. However, as one school reported, this was a bit vague, and they were planning to tighten up and refine the initiative. Another reported that although Key Skills were not in the records of achievement now, they had been in previous years.

Other programmes

Other opportunities to develop Key Skills in Key Stage 4, included pre-16 work experience and other careers or education business link activities. In some schools, Key Skills were assessed by employers during work experience, and the Key Skills were identified in the work experience diaries. An example of this is described in Case Study 1.

Case Study 1 — Pre-16 Work Experience

One school was planning a new work experience initiative for Year 10. Students will keep diaries with Key Skills sections in them, to mark achievements and build up a Key Skill portfolio. As part of this initiative, employers will be asked to complete a Key Skill Assessment Record indicating a student's ability in all the Key Skill areas except Problem Solving, and a sixth section on General Capabilities, which include attendance, punctuality and reliability. Work experience students will get a Key Skills Certificate indicating the Key Skills they have used and developed while on work experience. This initiative will feed into their record of achievement.

Two of the schools included in the survey had been offering the Diploma in Vocational Education which included Key Skills. However, one had recently changed over to Compact 2000, because it was considered to involve less time and be less costly.

Some schools we visited were participating in the pilot of the GNVQ Part 1 in Years 10 and 11, which includes assessment of Key Skills. Case Study 2 provides an illustration of how these pilots are being introduced.

In many schools there were plans afoot to expand Key Skills programmes in Key Stage four. For example, in one school, it was planned that all GCSE students would do two GNVQ units linked to a particular curriculum subject, *eg* those doing geography GCSE would do two GNVQ Intermediate Leisure and Tourism units. This way, all students would be exposed to Key Skills, although it was not envisaged that the Key Skills units would be awarded.

Case Study 2 — GNVQ Part 1

In one school, Part 1 is offered at Foundation and Intermediate Level in Art and Design, and Leisure and Tourism, and an application has been made to extend the pilots to subjects in engineering and manufacturing. The first cohort will finish in Summer 1998 and increasing numbers of students are applying to do the GNVQ Part 1. It had been a hard sell to the parents because they think their children should be doing GCSEs, but it is in the options booklet and the Year 11s that are doing it now have sold it for the school.

2.3.3 Post-16

GNVQ

Three-quarters of the schools offered GNVQ courses, but most of these were only doing the compulsory Key Skills for GNVQ, *ie* IT, application of number, and communication, formally.

> *'As part of the GNVQs we are only doing the 'essential three' at the moment. Whether the other three come into the curriculum depends on Dearing.'*

In discussing Key Skills with respondents in schools, they were most able to talk about GNVQ, because they had been delivering these courses for some time. It was felt that teachers were starting to get grips with what was required.

Key Skills units for 'A' level students

Schools were realising that all post-16 courses should cover Key Skills. For example in one school:

> *'All staff are aware of Key Skills and introducing Key Skills to all students. We would like all students to be familiar and at ease with Key Skills.'*

In one school, 'A' level students were signing off Key Skills as the GNVQ students do, using the log books. Another was involved in a pilot of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) free standing Key Skills units for 'A' levels, based on GNVQ units. Two of the schools were working towards the Diploma of Achievement. This encompasses the Key Skills as well as survival skills: safety in the home, nutrition, first aid, car maintenance and road safety.

Key Skills were generally covered, although not necessarily explicitly, in general studies or enrichment programmes, as well as one-off events such as industry days. Two schools were about to do the GNVQ careers management unit. It was thought that offering a formal qualification would help to ensure that general studies programmes were taken more seriously by students. In one school, all post-16 students were working towards the CLAIT IT qualification.

Other programmes and initiatives covering Key Skills for post-16 students were:

- a planned drop-in learning centre for application of number, IT and communication skills
- the Youth Award Scheme for 'A' level students
- a flexible post-16 careers programme, involving one-to-one and group activities.

2.4 Overall approaches to Key Skills

Most schools did not have an overall plan relating to Key Skills across the school, as yet. Instead, a series of disparate packages were being introduced in different parts of the school, at the different key stages and for different courses. For the most part, no links had been made between these courses or programmes and no progression had been built in, *eg* GNVQ in Year 12 did not build upon what had been covered in ASDAN Youth Award Scheme in Year 11. A small number of the schools, however, were beginning to introduce, or were planning to take, a more co-ordinated approach to Key Skills.

It should also be noted that in about half of the schools we visited, there was one person with overall responsibility for co-ordinating the delivery of Key Skills throughout the school. In other schools, different members of staff had responsibility for different programmes. For example, individual members of staff would be co-ordinating Superskills, Compact 2000 and GNVQ. In some cases, it was for this reason that different approaches to Key Skills was being taken at each of the key stages.

In the following section we discuss the two main approaches to delivering Key Skills:

- integrating Key Skills into the curriculum, schemes of work and GNVQ assignments, and
- stand alone or 'bolted on' activities to cover Key Skills, such as stand alone Key Skills lessons for GNVQ or separate activities to cover Key Skills in PSE, *eg* the Diploma of Achievement programme.

We outline below the approaches being taken in schools and the merits in the following sections. Table 2:2 provides a summary of these approaches, the advantages of each and some of the difficulties experienced.

2.4.1 Integration

Systems for recording and assessing Key Skills, such as Superskills, student profiles and personal organisers with sections devoted to some or all Key Skills, had been introduced as a means of teaching and assessing the skills in a range of curriculum subjects. These initiatives were seen by our respondents as a means of making young people aware of the Key Skills, tracking, and recording their progress in developing the skills. In some schools, Key Skills programmes were seen as a signing off, rather than a teaching exercise. Typical responses were:

> *'Key Skills cannot be taught but we can provide opportunities to develop the Key Skills. There is no point in doing discrete courses on Key Skills, these are skills young people already have . . . now they get a certificate to say they have the Key Skill at a certain level.'*
>
> *'. . . You can't teach action planning. . . . They are things which are taught anyway, we are just being more explicit about it.'*

There was some variation between the schools which were integrating Key Skills across the curriculum in this way, in terms of the extent to which they were being explicit about the Key

Table 2:2 Perceived advantages and disadvantages of integration or standalone activity for delivering Key Skills in schools

	Key Skills initiative or programmes	Advantages	Difficulties
Integration	Superskills Student profiles Key Skills recorded in organisers Key Skills identified in schemes of work and GNVQ assignments	Helps students appreciate relevance and importance of Key Skills Helps students appreciate the linkages across the curriculum May help students take responsibility for their own learning, if they can identify when the Key Skills have been covered themselves	Lack of resources: 1. Time to identify and map where Key Skills are covered in the curriculum 2. The Key Skills of staff (in particular IT and application of number) and their ability to apply the Key Skills to their schemes of work 3. Computer equipment not available Difficulties integrating IT into the curriculum when students do not have basic IT skills.
Stand alone	PSE: Compact, ASDAN Youth Award, Diploma of Achievement Separate IT lessons, CLAIT GNVQ, induction activities, application of number and IT	Stand alone activities in PSE can complement and build upon Key Skills in the broader curriculum Need extra IT lessons as a 'quick fix' to get students up to speed Not all Key Skills can be incorporated into GNVQ assignments so need some top-up activity	Students may not take Key Skills seriously or appreciate the relevance of the Key Skills

Source: IES

Skills. For instance, with Superskills, some of the schools were leaving it to the individual students to identify when each skill had been covered, and the onus was on them to request for the skill to be signed off. In others, when, where and by whom each skill should be recorded was more specific.

A few of the schools were beginning to be explicit about and link the Key Skills across the curriculum. One approach was to identify the Key Skills covered once work on the skills had been started. One school, when referring to students with special needs, noted that:

> *'We are not making a big thing about Key Skills. . . . We mention at the end of a class that they had worked on working with others or communication skills, so as not to phase them with concepts which are hard to get to grips with.'*

The general view was that it was preferable to integrate Key Skills into the curriculum. For example, as one respondent put it:

> *'It is better if Key Skills come out from what kids are doing anyway and make Key Skills natural, not bolt on.'*

The benefit of so doing was to help young people to appreciate the links across the curriculum, and the relevance and application of the Key Skills in a range of settings. A key factor for the successful integration of Key Skills was seen by our respondents as mapping the Key Skills across the curriculum, *ie* being aware of what other staff are doing, making linkages across the curriculum, and making the Key Skills explicit in schemes of work. Another important factor to successful integration of Key Skills was to have someone co-ordinating Key Skills across the whole curriculum.

However, one school reported that although this was the ideal, it was not always possible. It was felt that the problem with mapping and co-ordinating Key Skills was that some teachers were unable to see or appreciate how their subject covered Key Skills. Another difficulty identified was finding the time to conduct such mapping exercises, and there was concern that the workload of doing so would not be evenly shared between staff, with the better organised and more enthusiastic staff taking the greater load.

GNVQ

In GNVQ programmes there was some variation according to the extent to which Key Skills were being integrated within GNVQ assignments. Key Skills work in most schools was an evidence gathering exercise where the vocational assignments were used to assess Key Skills. In most cases there was a combination of integrated and stand alone activity.

Case Study 3 — Integrating Key Skills into GNVQ

In one school it was reported that in the main Key Skills were entirely integrated within GNVQs. However, teachers of GNVQ were flexible and able to provide extra support with Key Skills as and when required. The crucial factor seemed to be that because abilities varied between students, what was right for one was not necessarily right for another. Teachers involved in Key Skills felt they needed to be able to identify and respond to students' needs.

One school had recently moved from bolting on Key Skills to the GNVQ, to Key Skills being taught across the GNVQ. Some of the GNVQ students reported that they preferred the way that Key Skills were integrated into the GNVQ modules, as it meant that they were easier to sign off, and the teachers had a better idea of what the students had been doing. Where Key Skills were entirely integrated into the GNVQ, the schools tended to have produced their own material to do so.

2.4.2 Stand alone

As we have noted above, in many schools Key Skills were being delivered through PSE and the careers education and guidance curriculum. This was through programmes such as Compact 2000, the ASDAN Youth Award, and Work Experience. Schools delivering Key Skills through these programmes alone could be described as taking a stand alone approach, in that Key Skills were not being integrated across the curriculum and they were seen as being explicitly covered in these lessons and not elsewhere.

The Diploma of Achievement was clearly being delivered as a stand alone programme, through separate lessons. Respondents in one of the schools involved in this programme felt that any integration of Key Skills teaching into the broader curriculum would detract from the academic subjects. The Diploma of Achievement was viewed as an exercise of accrediting skills already developed within subjects, identifying gaps and filling them. In contrast, the other school delivering the Diploma of Achievement felt that the programme was not valued by 'A' Level students, because it was a 'bolted on' activity.

Most respondents felt that delivering Key Skills through PSE should be one of a range of methods of delivering Key Skills, and complement and build upon other activities. For example, one school was starting to integrate the skills into the wider curriculum, as well as delivering them through ASDAN and activities such as Outward Bound.

Barriers to integrating Key Skills

In many cases, it was felt that it was not always possible to integrate Key Skills, and it was for this reason that extra stand alone programmes were provided. There were felt to be particular problems with integrating IT and application of number, and we came across a lot of stand alone activity in these areas. With IT a number of difficulties were identified:

- **The IT skills of the student**: if students do not have these skills, they need to be taught before they can be applied. For instance, as one respondent put it, you cannot afford to spend a whole geography lesson teaching how to use a database package, before it can be applied.
- **Access to computers**: in some schools there was simply an insufficient number of computers to be able to use them across the curriculum.
- **The IT skills of staff and their ability to apply IT** to their schemes of work. This was also a problem with application of number.

In a number of schools, separate IT lessons were taking place. For example, in one school IT was taught in Years 7 to 9 while post-16 the students were working towards the CLAIT (Computer Literacy and IT) qualification. One respondent in a school where there were separate IT lesson felt that:

> *'IT should not be a separate subject. It's a tool, but we have so much ground to make up in IT it's a quick way to make progress.'*

GNVQ

Within GNVQ, there was generally a combination of stand alone and integrated activity to cover the Key Skills. Some schools introduced young people to the Key Skills through separate GNVQ induction programmes and activities. One school had given GNVQ students a whole week off the national curriculum to concentrate on their Key Skills.

Integrating application of number into GNVQ programmes was seen by some schools as being particularly problematic. There were considered to be problems with both the staffs' own abilities in this area, and the extent to which it could be made relevant:

> *'Integrating Key Skills into vocational work is hard. How much numeracy is it possible to build into Art and Design? Application of number is the most difficult to apply.'*
>
> *'Application of number is always tricky to make pertinent, it is about making it relevant to life and society.'*
>
> *'How do you teach cumulative frequency in art and design?'*

For these reasons, we came across extra or top .up stand alone activity for IT and application of number, in particular. In general, the other Key Skills were found to be easier to integrate.

2.5 Connections between Key Skills and other initiatives

Respondents were asked about connections between Key Skills and other initiatives they were involved in or programmes they were delivering. We have already discussed a number of these, namely:

- Compact 2000
- ASDAN Youth Award
- Action planning
- Work experience
- Records of achievement
- CLAIT
- Basic skills
- Enrichment activities.

We outline in the following sections other initiatives which were identified as having connections with Key Skills

2.5.1 The new 'National Record of Achievement'

A number of the schools visited were piloting the new 'National Record of Achievement'. One of these schools envisaged that in the future this would be the main route through which Key Skills would be delivered, through recording of evidence, action planning and goal setting. It was viewed as much more formative and summative than the old NRA. Another school was planning to develop the NRA with the support of a local employer, and build Key Skills in further.

2.5.2 Education business links

A number of education business link activities were identified as covering Key Skills. Examples of these were: industry days, where employers run sessions on business management; employer visits; an Education Business Partnership day at British Aerospace, for staff to develop staff team working skills; school to work week; and a Key Skills day run by Learning Partnership West with employer visits prior to pre-16 work experience.

2.5.3 Careers education and guidance

There were also clear links being made between careers education and guidance and Key Skills, and UCAS forms draw upon Key Skills. In many cases, the careers elements of PSE lessons were built around Key Skills. One school noted that their careers policy includes Key Skills. Investors in Careers was not mentioned as having any connections with Key Skills. This was not necessarily because there were not any, but that the schools we visited had not progressed very far with this initiative.

2.5.4 Investors in People

In a number of the interviews, respondents were prompted on the links between Investors in People and Key Skills. One respondent felt that there was a connection in relation to the need for staff training in Key Skills. Another felt there were similarities between the two initiatives in relation to the method they were being introduced, *ie* building upon what was already being done, rather than anything new. However, most schools did not see any connection between Investors in People and Key Skills.

2.5.5 Higher Reliability Project

One school was involved in the Higher Reliability Project and felt there were connections between this and Key Skills. This is using a battery of tests for literacy, numeracy, reading and spatial awareness, and allows schools and parents to track students' progress from their second month in the school.

3. Who is Involved in the Delivery of Key Skills?

In this chapter, we discuss who is involved in the delivery of Key Skills: Key Skills co-ordinators, teachers and tutors, students and parents. We consider their attitudes towards, and their understanding of, Key Skills. In the final section, we discuss the training and support schools are drawing upon to equip themselves to deliver Key Skills.

3.1 Who is involved?

3.1.1 Senior managers

As we have noted in Chapter 2, senior managers and headteachers in all the schools visited were committed to introducing Key Skills initiatives. This was viewed as critical for the success of Key Skills.

> *'Nothing will work in this school without Senior Management Team backing.'*

The headteachers interviewed saw their role as to demonstrate a commitment to ensure Key Skills were embedded and the initiatives worked well. Responsibility for managing Key Skills programmes and initiatives was delegated to Key Skills or programme co-ordinators.

3.1.2 Key Skills co-ordinators

In about half of the schools visited there was a member of staff whose role was Key Skills co-ordinator for the whole school. However, few of these were on the senior management team of the school. Examples of the positions of staff who were Key Skills co-ordinators were: deputy headteacher, deputy head of curriculum, head of curriculum and assessment, head of sixth form, head of Year 11, and head of vocational education. In one school, there had been a reworking of responsibilities and the creation of a new post: the guidance leader. Their responsibilities included developing core, key and study skills across the school, as well as responsibility for the new 'National Record of Achievement'. Most of the Key Skills co-ordinators were new to the role this academic year.

Respondents viewed the role of the Key Skills co-ordinator as to 'make Key Skills a whole school thing', draw Key Skills out and beyond GNVQ and into an integrated package, and to draw up strategies and plans for delivering Key Skills. It was also to co-ordinate the provision of support and training to equip staff to deliver Key Skills.

The co-ordinators were generally linked in with Learning Partnership West, and many had contact with the LPW Key Skills Development Manager. It was felt that the Key Skills co-ordinator needed an understanding of the skill requirements of employers. It was also thought to be important that they should be on, or close to, the senior management team of the school. This was in order to ensure the support of the senior management, heads of faculty and teachers for Key Skills.

3.1.3 Teachers and tutors

Teachers and tutors in the schools surveyed had varying amounts of involvement in Key Skills. For example, one school reported that only three teachers were involved. In another, it was mostly GNVQ staff. The types of staff who were involved in the initiatives were:

- heads of faculty: to co-ordinate the integration of Key Skills into schemes of work
- GNVQ co-ordinators and teachers: to deliver Key Skills units for GNVQ
- tutors: Superskills and records of achievement
- PSE teachers: for delivering Key Skills programmes in PSE
- heads of careers, careers teachers and Compact co-ordinators, and co-ordinators of programmes such as the Diploma of Achievement, and
- all staff where Superskills had been introduced (in Years 7 and 8) and where Key Skills were starting to be integrated across the curriculum.

3.1.4 Other actors

- Employers: we have discussed in Chapter 2 the role of education business links in delivering Key Skills. Some schools had involved local Rotary Clubs in Key Skills activities, and some had gained funding from local employers for Key Skills related projects.
- Parents: we came across some examples of schools which had involved parents in action planning and goal setting relating to Key Skills.
- Learning Partnership West and the Local Education Authority: for the provision of support and advice (see Section 3.3).

3.2 Perceptions of Key Skills

3.2.1 Teachers and tutors

It has been reported to us both by senior management and teaching staff themselves that staff attitudes towards Key Skills vary both between and within schools. There was also wide variation within schools as to the priority staff gave to Key Skills. Key Skills were at the forefront of some teachers' minds. Others did not find the time to map and match Key Skills to their schemes of work due to pressure of work. As one respondent put it: 'some staff are horribly cynical about the whole thing'. A typical view was that staff fell into two camps: those who were enthusiastic and committed to Key Skills and those who did not see the relevance or importance of them. For some it was reported to be a shock that they were there not just to teach a subject but a broader education, and there was a resistance to change. As one respondent put it:

> *'I'm here to teach Maths. Why do I have to teach the Diploma of Achievement?'*

Knowledge of Key Skills also varied within schools. At the time of the survey, it seemed that only a few staff understood Key Skills (usually those delivering GNVQs and other initiatives, such as Compact 2000). In some schools it was argued that these were the only ones who were affected, at the moment.

Initiative overload was commonly reported to be an issue. One respondent said that the analogy given to teaching over the last few years was of 'plate-spinners'. There was a certain degree of cynicism over all new initiatives. However, this was diminishing as regards Key Skills, because they seemed to be here to stay.

> *'Once teachers develop a knowledge and understanding of Key Skills they will realise Key Skills are part of what they teach and part of the everyday curriculum anyway.'*

The two main difficulties that schools were encountering were therefore a feeling of initiative overload and a lack of time to devote to Key Skills. Case Study 1 provides an illustration of this.

Case Study 1 — Staff Attitudes Towards Key Skills

This school was having difficulty bringing some teachers on board with Key Skills, as there was a certain degree of initiative overload in the school. Some staff did not see the long term benefits of doing Key Skills. Some were still very subject oriented, especially the older and longer-serving staff. Heads of faculty were being encouraged to integrate Key Skills into schemes of work. However, some teachers felt they lacked the time and energy to take charge of another layer of work on top of national curriculum assessment.

In some cases, there was also thought to be a lack of staff ability in Key Skills areas themselves and how to deliver them. Generally, it was thought that all staff felt confident with communication skills, but number skills were more variable. One school also felt there were difficulties in getting across to staff how to record and assess Key Skills and Superskills.

> *'Teachers in the school are very professional and will go two miles when only need to go two yards. . . . Some staff are resistant to change and actually cannot cope with change.'*

3.2.2 GNVQ staff

A general view from our respondents was that GNVQ staff had a good understanding of the value of the Key Skills. A typical response was because they had been delivering Key Skills in GNVQ since 1995, they had built up skills, banks of assignments and ideas for Key Skills, and now felt reasonably confident with them.

However, there was variation in the perceived relevance of the Key Skills by GNVQ subject area. For example, in one school, we spoke to two teachers with opposing attitudes towards Key Skills. One teacher of GNVQ leisure and tourism, who was also involved in Compact, was very positive about Key Skills and thought they were worthwhile for students, the school and employers. However, another teacher whose subject was art and design was negative about the Key Skills. He had to teach as part of the GNVQ. The respondent felt the Key Skills interfered with the art and that there was not enough time in the syllabus to cover the Key Skills. Our findings suggest that teachers are experiencing particular problems with Key Skills in art and design. Another respondent noted that:

> *'Their* (students') *art skills are so low we have to concentrate on that. Key Skills are impossible to teach on top.'*

A number of GNVQ teachers were of the opinion that the Key Skills were not pitched at the right level. There was again perceived to be a particular problem with application of number in art and design courses.

Respondents reported difficulties in getting staff with the right skills mix teaching GNVQ subjects and the Key Skills units. As one of our interviewees put it:

> *'you can either have a maths teacher teaching application of number who does not understand GNVQ, or a GNVQ teacher who understands GNVQ but whose only qualification to teach application of number is a maths 'A' level'.*

This school found it preferable to do the latter. It was apparent that application of number presented particular difficulties in this respect.

> *'Maths teachers delivering application of number is bad news. Teachers of Key Skills must be au fait with the vocational aspect and link in the Key Skills, not teach them separately.'*

One school had tried team teaching to address this issue, but had failed because staff were uncomfortable with, and not used to, working in teams.

> *'To have another teacher in class is very disconcerting.'*

We have noted above, however, that GNVQ staff generally had built up expertise in delivering Key Skills and were starting to address these issues. One school, for example, was planning to teach GNVQ in a suite of classrooms, so classes could run concurrently and they could draw from the expertise of a range of staff during lessons. A number of the schools were now using GNVQ staff to support other staff in the school delivering Key Skills.

3.2.3 Students

In relation to students' attitudes towards Key Skills, we can draw from both the findings from the questionnaire survey of students and the group interviews. We begin by looking at the questionnaire data.

Questionnaire survey

Students responding to the postal survey were asked to rank the importance of each of the Key Skills on a scale of one to five, with one corresponding to 'not at all important' and five, 'very important'. They were specifically asked about the importance of these skills for what they wanted to do after they had left school, *ie* continue in education, look for a job or a training place. We show their responses to this question in Table 3:1. It is clear from these data that all the Key Skills were seen as important by the majority of students surveyed. Application of number, IT and problem solving, however, were considered of lesser importance than the other three Key Skills. Interestingly, employers also rank these lower in terms of importance (see Chapter 7). Conversely, working with others was considered by students as the most important Key Skill. As shown by the 1997 WESTEC Employer Survey (Prism Research Ltd, 1997) this is an area where employers are least satisfied with young people's skill levels. This would suggest that these students have an understanding of the skills required in the labour market.

We have analysed our sample by those who were working towards a GNVQ or involved in other programmes which covered Key Skills, such as Compact 2000. We can see from Table 3:1 that in general these subsamples rate the Key Skills as more important than the overall sample of students. This indicates that participating in these programmes has had an

Table 3:1 Young people's views on the importance of Key Skills

	All		**Future plans**			**Qualifications or programmes working towards**	
	Very important/ important	*Mean score*	*Continue in education*	*Look for a job*	*Look for a training place*	*GNVQ*	*Programmes covering Key Skills (inc. GNVQ)*
Key Skills	%	**Mean score**	**Mean score**	**Mean score**	**Mean score**	**Mean score**	**Mean score**
Written communication skills	88	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.3
Oral communication skills	88	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.4
Application of number	66	3.9	3.8	4.1	3.7	4.0	3.8
Information technology	76	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.2
Working with others	91	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
Improving own learning and performance	85	4.4	4.4	4.2	4.5	4.5	4.5
Problem solving	72	4.0	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.1	4.0
N = whole student sample	*190*		*138*	*44*	*18*	*83*	*122*

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score

Source: IES Students Survey

impact on young people, in terms of their understanding of the importance of Key Skills. However, the differences are small and it may be the case that students who decide to study for a GNVQ are more likely to consider Key Skills important.

Comparing those who had participated in these courses or programmes to those who had not, we have found that:

- GNVQ students saw all the Key Skills as slightly more important than those who were not studying for a GNVQ, except for written communication skills. These differences, although small, are in fact statistically significant.
- The subsample participating in all programmes covering Key Skills and GNVQ tends to show smaller differences with those who were not involved. It was only three skills (improving own learning and performance, working with others and IT) that this group considered to be slightly more important.

In Table 3:2 we analyse the sample by gender, which demonstrates some more significant variations. Our findings reflect the common stereotypes, with male students rating application of number and IT more highly than females. Female respondents appeared to rate working with others as considerably more important than their male counterparts.

Table 3:2 Young people's views on the importance of Key Skills

Key Skills	All		Gender	
	Very important important	*Mean score*	*Female*	*Male*
	%	**Mean score**	**Mean score**	**Mean score**
Written communication skills	88	4.4	4.4	4.3
Oral communication skills	88	4.4	4.4	4.3
Application of number	66	3.9	3.7	4.1
Information technology	76	4.1	4.1	4.2
Working with others	91	4.4	4.6	4.3
Improving own learning and performance	85	4.4	4.4	4.3
Problem solving	72	4.0	4.0	4.0
N = whole student sample	*190*		*128*	*78*

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Source: IES Students Survey

Group interviews

Most of the students we interviewed were very receptive and interested in Key Skills and saw them as very important. One student said he thought Key Skills were good because:

> *'They are something different, give us wider options and we learn more skills to take to college or work.'*

Others noted that:

> (Key Skills are) *'the basis for everything.'*

A group of Year 7 students who were involved in Superskills told us that they understood the value of the skills and recognised that all the Key Skills were important. Comments from these students were:

> *'Computers are useful for getting a job.'*

> *'Superskills have made me realise that listening is a skill.'*

Case Study 2 overleaf provides an example of some 'A' level students who were enthusiastic about their Key Skills work.

Teachers also generally reported that students understood the relevance of Key Skills. One teacher said that initially GNVQ students did not see the relevance of Key Skills and thought they were just something they had to do. However, by the end of the course they had come to see the relevance of the Key Skills.

Case Study 2 — 'A' Level Students Recording their Key Skills

These students were recording their Key Skills in log books. Staff perceived that the students understood the value of Key Skills. The students interviewed saw them as the 'everyday skills' and felt that focusing upon them helped with 'A' level studies. Communication was seen as the most important Key Skill. The students reported that working through the log books helped to identify the areas they needed to focus upon and work on. They also saw it as beneficial in terms of placing them ahead of other schools, gaining recognition for the skills they had, proving they had these everyday skills, providing evidence to employers, and writing CVs.

Nevertheless, there was some variation among students. Some students on GNVQ courses did not see some of the Key Skills as relevant to them. Again, application of number was cited as causing problems in art and design. For example, in one school, art and design students did not see application of number as relevant. As their teacher noted:

> *'They turn up for academic lessons but not to Key Skill lessons.'*

Convincing students of the importance of application of number and communication was proving difficult in art and design in another school, but these students could see how IT fitted into the subject, with developments like CAD.

Teachers involved in Key Skills were aware of the importance of persuading students of the benefits of Key Skills. It was felt by some teachers that they needed some 'collateral', *ie* to be able to say to the students that employers, colleges and universities value Key Skills. One teacher thought that progress files would help persuade students that Key Skills were important.

Students attitudes towards Key Skills also appeared to depend partly on how confident they felt about their abilities. In one school, where IT was taught in Years 7 to 9, students we spoke to were positive about IT because they felt confident using it. However, some of the same students did not have GCSE Maths or English and they were less confident in these areas.

3.3 Equipping schools to deliver Key Skills

In this section we consider how schools are building up the expertise to deliver Key Skills, and the training and support which had been provided.

3.3.1 Staff training

In terms of staff training, there appeared to be a mixture of informal and formal methods used. However, a key point to note is that budgets for staff training and support for Key Skills were clearly limited, and most schools were relying on the sharing of existing expertise within the school.

Launching Key Skills

Key Skills had been launched in schools at events, often through INSET. This would involve up to a day set aside where teachers and tutors would be introduced to Key Skills. We were told that these events had involved talks and group exercises, such as completing an LPW Key Skills map (see back of this report). In some cases a representative from Learning Partnership West had presented at these sessions and events. Some had introduced Key Skills through a series of events and staff meetings. For example, in one school, the first event was to launch Key Skills. This was followed up by a second session to discuss assessment and evidence gathering.

How the Key Skills was introduced to staff was considered to be of great importance. As we have already noted, the trick was generally felt to be not to introduce Key Skills as anything new in the school, but as building on work already done. As one school put it, the initiative would otherwise be met with belligerence and apathy.

> *'Key Skills are not a new initiative, we are already doing it. We just need to make it more explicit.'*

However, a common complaint was that there had been insufficient lead-in times. Some schools felt they had launched and introduced Key Skills before staff were fully up to speed. Some of the schools which had not yet launched Key Skills were taking things more slowly. Two of the schools were planning launch events in the near future. The plan was then to begin to integrate Key Skills into more of the curriculum, and start making Key Skills more explicit.

External training

Some external training and conferences had been used. In a number of schools, for example, staff had had D32 and D33 assessor training. Schools were very positive about the training and support provided by LPW. The Key Skills mapping exercise developed by LPW, for instance, was found to be very useful. We also heard some very positive comments about the conferences run by LPW and the LEAs. However, schools were more critical about the D32 and D33 assessor training. As one respondent noted:

> *'This is not the best . . . it is not specific enough for teaching staff, it is too theoretical, it is not for the classroom. We need good practitioners and deliverers of Key Skills. I am not sure if such training is available.'*

One school who felt they were comparatively quite advanced on Key Skills was becoming more sceptical about sending staff on external courses and conferences. The school felt they could give a clearer picture on Key Skills within the school, and that external courses may confuse the issue and lead to staff getting mixed messages. In this particular school there was also a reluctance to share ideas and the materials they had developed with other schools.

Sharing ideas

Expertise and knowledge is being built up within schools through Key Skills co-ordinators, heads of faculty and heads of house. The idea is that through these key staff and the sharing of ideas and materials internally, expertise would trickle down. Also staff meetings, particularly GNVQ staff meetings, are used for sharing ideas. However, our respondents repeatedly reported a lack of time to devote to this. Logistics can also prevent staff getting together.

Two key messages are coming through from the research, in relation to building up staff commitment to, and expertise in, Key Skills. Firstly, not to present Key Skills as something that is radically new but rather building upon what is done anyway, and being more explicit about Key Skills. Secondly, that any raising of awareness and training (formal and informal) needs to be ongoing, so the impetus is not lost after, for example, a launch event. As one respondent put it:

> *'We need to keep going at it.'*

3.3.2 Other support

As we have noted above, schools were generally very positive about the materials provided by Learning Partnership West and the individual support from careers advisors. One school was using materials produced by CRAC to find activities for Key Skills in GNVQ. These were found to be especially useful for application of number, which sometimes could not be integrated into the subjects. Schools were also building up a bank of assignments and activities developed internally. Other support reported to us was networking events across schools which were starting to get off the ground.

4. Delivery of Key Skills in Practice

We begin this chapter with a discussion of learning experiences in schools which develop Key Skills, drawing out examples of effective practice. This is followed by a discussion of some of the barriers and problems schools encounter in developing young peoples' Key Skills. The final section of the chapter considers perceptions of the impact of Key Skills development on young people. We conclude by discussing the challenges respondents in schools were currently facing, in relation to Key Skills.

4.1 Learning experiences which develop Key Skills

We asked respondents in schools, both students and staff, about the opportunities young people had to develop their Key Skills. We begin our discussion of these learning experiences by drawing from the questionnaire survey of young people.

4.1.1 Questionnaire survey

Our findings from the questionnaire survey provide an indication of where and how young people have been able to develop Key Skills. Students were asked about where they had the opportunity to improve their skills. We show their responses to this question in Table 4:1.

Table 4:1 Opportunities to develop Key Skills (students' views) (per cent)

Key Skills	Subject lessons at school	Other school activities	Work experience placement	Hobbies/ leisure activities	Part time or holiday job
Written communication skills	97	17	23	20	18
Oral communication skills	90	40	40	50	47
Application of number	92	20	24	13	43
Information technology	93	25	28	33	22
Working with others	88	55	54	65	58
Improving own learning and performance	88	36	36	34	38
Problem solving	91	28	32	30	41
N = whole student sample (multiple responses allowed)	*190*	*190*	*190*	*190*	*190*

Source: IES Student Survey

A number of points can be drawn from these data.

- Students were of the opinion that subject lessons provided them with most opportunity to develop their Key Skills, with around 90 per cent of respondents considering that they had been able to improve all their Key Skills in lessons.
- Considerably fewer young people, between one-quarter and one-half, felt they had developed their Key Skills through other activities within and outside school.
- Working with others was the skill most likely to be developed through activities other than subject lessons.
- Hobbies and leisure activities were considered by many students to provide opportunities to develop the Key Skills, particularly oral communication skills and working with others.
- Compared to trainees (see Chapter 6), students currently at school were much more likely to consider that school provided them with the opportunity to develop Key Skills.

In Table 4:2, we analyse opportunities whereby young people had been able to develop their Key Skills by three sub samples:

- students working towards GNVQ
- students participating in programmes which cover Key Skills, *eg* Compact 2000, Diploma of Achievement and GNVQ
- students whose Key Skills had been assessed on work experience.

Table 4:2 Opportunities to develop Key Skills, by programmes students were working towards (per cent)

	GNVQ	**Programmes covering Key Skills (including GNVQ and NVQ)**			**Key Skills assessed on work experience**
Key Skills	**Subject lessons at school**	**Subject lessons at school**	**Other school activities**	**Work experience**	**Work experience**
Written communication skills	99	99	17	18	35
Oral communication skills	92	93	39	39	53
Application of number	90	92	21	21	32
Information technology	95	94	26	26	37
Working with others	89	89	50	52	68
Improving own learning and performance	92	94	34	30	60
Problem solving	86	89	28	30	45
N = students working towards qualification or programme (multiple responses allowed)	*83*	*122*	*122*	*122*	60

Source: IES Student Survey

These analyses show that:

- students working towards GNVQ were slightly more likely than non-GNVQ students to consider that all the Key Skills were covered in subject lessons, except for application of number and problem solving
- students participating in any of the programmes covering Key Skills were more likely to consider that all the Key Skills were covered in lessons, and improving own learning and performance particularly so
- work experience was considered to provide significantly more opportunity to develop Key Skills, when Key Skills had been assessed on the placement.

4.1.2 Examples of learning experiences which develop Key Skills

Respondents were asked to provide examples of projects used to develop Key Skills in school. We outline some of the examples given by course or programme below.

GNVQ

For GNVQ advanced business studies, an example of an activity given by a school in a rural area was a marketing strategy for a pork based meat product. This involved designing the packaging, producing a video for the marketing plan, obtaining and analysing social statistics on meat consumption and data on meat sales, market research, designing a questionnaire, pricing the product, devising a distribution strategy and then making a presentation to sell the product to the rest of the group. The activity was considered to cover all of the Key Skills, be varied, student centred, vocational and meaningful, with a business studies focus.

An example given for an art and design GNVQ foundation course was setting up a mock art gallery. This involved calculating costings and talking to visitors to estimate the level of business.

For the GNVQ Part 1 pilot, application of number was covered through things such as preparing invoices and calculating the volume of a room. It was thought that communication skills were easier to make relevant than application of number, especially in health and social care.

An example of an activity to introduce Key Skills during the induction at the beginning of a GNVQ course was developing the packaging for juggling balls. This involved market research and analysis of customer responses. It was felt that the project helped students to appreciate the relevance of Key Skills.

PSE: Compact 2000 and ASDAN

An example of a project used for the Compact 2000 programme was assessing how the media portrays the world of work. The students designed the project and identified the skills they would be using. The project involved research, working in teams, sharing information and presenting information. The project was thought to work well because it was using something students enjoyed doing in their own time, *eg* watching 'soaps': discussing how work is portrayed and the stereotypes used.

Other activities given included researching job opportunities and preparing mock job applications, which were thought to work well if they were introduced at an appropriate stage. Many of the projects involved the students identifying for themselves the Key Skills being covered.

Work experience

Work experience was often reported to be a successful activity for developing Key Skills through finding and arranging placements, the work experience diary, Key Skills assessment during the placement and debrief afterwards.

Enrichment and extra-curricular activities

Examples of other opportunities to develop Key Skills were enrichment activities, such as photography, which involved working with others and students taking responsibility for themselves. One respondent told us that in their particular school activities needed to be practical and not classroom based to capture the interest of the students. Another example was arranging a party for elderly residents of a home.

Curriculum activities

As we have already noted, many of the respondents felt that Key Skills should be integral to the curriculum. As one respondent put it:

> *'We would like all Key Skills to disappear and become part of their natural work.'*

An example given was for English: students going away to read a book and coming back to discuss it in class, to cover communication skills, or group work to cover working with others.

4.1.3 Learning experiences which contribute most to the development of Key Skills

Assimilating the messages from respondents, we summarise below the types of projects which contribute most to the development of Key Skills.

Relevant: Activities need to be relevant to students' school work or what they want to do in the future. The key to a successful activity appears to be that young people grasp the value of covering the Key Skills. As one respondent put it, the Key Skills assignments have to be relevant to the age group and, in GNVQ, relevant to the subject. We have come across some examples of activities when the relevance was not apparent to the students, *eg* histograms for 'A' level students, when this had already been covered in GCSE.

Timely: To be of value to students, activities need to be relevant to what they are doing at the time or in the near future. For example, making mock job applications early in Year 10 was given as an example of an unsuccessful activity. It was too far ahead of what students were doing at the time, and students did not find this useful.

Pitched at the right level: Students need to have the experience to be able to carry out the project. On the other hand, as some 'A' level students pointed out to us, it is better to aim too high, rather than do something 'childish'. An important issue for GNVQ teachers is that the abilities of students doing Intermediate level vary from those studying Advanced GNVQ, and therefore the Key Skills activities used need to reflect this. For some mixed ability classes this can present difficulties.

Explicit about the Key Skills being covered: Generally it was felt that students needed to understand how and when the Key Skills were being covered, in order to appreciate their applicability across the curriculum and in their lives outside and beyond school. However, some teachers felt that in some cases, especially with application of number, it was useful to do the Key Skills without the students realising it. There also appeared to be some debate about at what stage in the project the Key Skills should be identified, *ie* at the outset, during the project, or on completion.

Practicable: Obviously, teething problems can be experienced with the introduction of new activities. We have found examples of activities which were not actually possible, *eg* students being asked to collect pay and grading information during work experience, when employers were not willing to supply this information. It is therefore clearly essential that activities should be practicable.

Interesting: The activities the students appeared to have enjoyed the most were those which they found interesting or that had allowed them to be creative. An example of a successful activity given by a GNVQ student was devising an advertising campaign for a rock band. Clearly, there is a need for a mixture of different kinds of activities to appeal to the interests of different students.

Feedback provided: Evaluation of the assignment is important for both students and teachers, so they can assess what has been covered and see ways of improvement. Post-16 pupils reported that they found peer assessment useful when doing presentations. However, some younger students we have spoken to found this difficult.

4.2 Recording and assessing Key Skills

The large majority (83 per cent) of students responding to the questionnaire had had their Key Skills assessed or recorded. It should, however, be re-emphasised that our sample is not representative of all students and that we were focusing upon schools which had already started explicitly developing Key Skills. We show in Table 4:3 the documents which had been used for recording or assessing Key Skills by the students participating in the questionnaire survey.

Key Skills are formally accredited by an external body in GNVQ, by the OCEAC examinations board for the Diploma of Achievement and by ASDAN, which has awarding body status, for the Youth Award. Key Skills are internally certificated within schools where Superskills programmes have been introduced or where Key Skills are being recorded in personal organisers or student profiles.

There was varying opinion, among our respondents in schools, as to whether the Key Skills should be externally accredited or not. Some schools felt they needed external accreditation to be of value, others were of the opinion that a piece of paper was not necessary. Some of the schools which were more focused upon academic achievement, were more in favour of formal recognition of the Key Skills. It was often felt that general studies was taken more seriously where this occurred. However, in other cases, it

Table 4:3 Documents used by young people for recording and assessing Key Skills (per cent)

Qualifications and programmes	All	Year	
		Key Stage 4	Post-16
NRA/record of achievement	40	60	28
GNVQ log book	40	27	47
Work experience assessment	32	53	24
Student profile/student planner	21	36	10
Diploma of Achievement	5	–	7
Compact 2000 modules	4	15	–
Other (NVQ, Youth Award Scheme, Royal Sun Alliance Key Skills Pack)	5	13	–
N = whole student sample (multiple responses allowed)	*190*	*55*	*127*

Source: IES Student Survey

was understood that the possession of Key Skills: 'spoke for themselves', as outlined by the following quote:

> *'The value is that young people can talk about what they can do. . . . This understanding and recognition and ability to draw up CVs is what is important, so that young people can provide evidence of what they can do and present themselves effectively.'*

It appears that each school was taking the approach of recording and assessing Key Skills, which was felt to be most appropriate to their pupils and the nature of the school.

We outline below the approaches taken to assessing Key Skills in the different Key Stages, and some of the issues identified by respondents in relation to assessment.

4.2.1 Key Stage 3

Superskills had recently been introduced in some of the schools visited and were being signed off in school planners or diaries by teachers. The Superskills were then internally certificated, when each of the skills had been signed off twice. Many of the students were clearly quite motivated by doing this. However there was clearly variation among staff in terms of their approach and understanding of the skills. In some cases, students were left to identify when to ask for a Superskill to be signed off. Some students felt less able to approach certain teachers in order to do this. Other teachers would sign off a whole class at one time when a skill area had been covered in a lesson. There also appeared to be an issue as to the consistency of the standard to which the skills were being signed off.

In order to address this issue, one school which was planning to introduce Superskills in the next academic year was clearly specifying which teachers could sign off what skills, and assessment times were identified. The evidence required for assessment was also made clear, so that the skills would be assessed to a consistent standard. This school recognised that there was a need to achieve a balance between students having control, and identifying for themselves when a Key Skill area had been covered, and achieving a level of consistency.

4.2.2 Key Stage 4

Key Skills were being externally accredited by ASDAN in a number of the schools visited. However, we came across varying opinions of the ASDAN award. One of the schools was particularly critical:

> *'Kids rate what gives them a qualification. They are not really into ASDAN. They don't fall for rubbish or pseudo qualifications and nor do tutors.'*

Students participating in Compact 2000 can claim credit towards the ASDAN Youth Award. However, none of the schools were working towards formal accreditation of Key Skills through Compact 2000 at the time of the survey. Key Skills were being recorded in Key Stage 4 in the NRA, and internal documents such as student profiles. In some schools, they were being assessed during work experience placements. For example, in one school, employers were given Key Skills assessment records to record work placement students' abilities in all six of the Key Skills. Students who used and developed Key Skills on their work placement were given a certificate at the end of it.

4.2.3 Post-16

GNVQ

In GNVQ, Key Skills are recorded in log books, and cross referenced and assessed by teachers. A number of issues were identified by respondents in relation to this:

- In some cases, there seemed to be difficulties in getting students to record the Key Skills themselves: some do, but teachers generally need to 'mop up'.
- In some cases, there appeared to be difficulties in recognising whether the required standards had been met among both staff and pupils.
- We repeatedly came across difficulties with the language used in GNVQ for Key Skills assessment. This was found to be the case for GNVQ Part 1 pilots, in particular. Where Key Skills log books had been adapted by schools and their own materials produced, we found that pupils found the recording of Key Skills relatively easy.
- Some schools reported difficulties in gathering evidence for Key Skills.
- A lack of time for evidencing Key Skills properly was noted in some schools.
- The issue of staff not having the Key Skills themselves, which we referred to in Chapter 3, was also raised in this context. This meant, in some instances, that the Key Skills needed to be delivered as a stand alone activity, as the GNVQ teaching staff did not have the skills to assess certain skills.

'A' level students

Examples of how Key Skills were being assessed and recorded by 'A' level students were using the GNVQ log books and the Diploma of Achievement.

In the school where 'A' level students were working through GNVQ log books, the students felt that recording their progress on Key Skills was useful, as it highlighted the areas they needed to work on or develop. When a Key Skill was signed off, they knew they had reached a good standard in that skill area. There had been no pressure put on these 'A' level students to work on the Key Skills, and many of these students did not feel it had created any extra work for them. However, they did feel they should have started signing off the Key Skills at an earlier stage in school. There were also sometimes difficulties identifying opportunities for assessment. An example given was finding an audience they did not know for a presentation.

In the schools which were working towards the Diploma of Achievement, the students valued the formal qualification.

4.3 Success factors and barriers schools encounter in delivering Key Skills

We summarise in Table 4:4 overleaf the factors which contribute to the success in delivering Key Skills, and the barriers and difficulties which schools have encountered. This draws from our findings already discussed in this chapter and the earlier chapters in this section of the report.

4.4 Impact of Key Skills development on young people

There are clearly difficulties in evaluating the impact of Key Skills development on young people, and a number of issues need to be considered:

- **A new initiative** — most of the schools felt it was too early to evaluate the impact of Key Skills, apart from in GNVQ.
- **Before and after** — ideally, to explore issues relating to the acquisition and impact of Key Skills, information needs to be collected before and after the implementation of certain events or initiatives. Given the time period for this research and the nature of the learning process, this has not been possible.
- **The existing abilities of young people** — the impact will obviously vary between students, since some will have 'further to travel' than others. As one teacher put it:

  > *'Those that have a better understanding of Key Skills may benefit more but the benefits are more apparent in the less able.'*

- **Key Skills development does not happen in a vacuum** — a common response was that the impact and benefits seen in GNVQ students, for instance, were not just due to the Key Skills units but the whole mode of learning required for GNVQ.

These points notwithstanding, we identify below some insights into the impact of Key Skills from our discussions with staff and students.

Table 4:4 Factors contributing to success and barriers which schools encounter in delivering Key Skills

Factors contributing to success	Barriers and problems encountered
Management of Key Skills: Key Skills co-ordinator: who is committed, understands the needs of employers and is empowered to develop the approach to Key Skills in the school. Supportive senior management team Key Skills management group **Links with employers** so that schools understand and are responsive to local labour market needs, employers can be involved in delivering Key Skills activities and provide work experience placements. **Outlook of the school** eg vocationally oriented or community schools.	**Lack of resources:** both time and funding for: IT equipment, training for staff, time to map Key Skills across the curriculum, to identify the opportunities to cover the Key Skills, to evidence the Key Skills properly, to cover Compact 2000 programmes properly and administrative time for GNVQ, so teachers can teach. Schools do not see much likelihood of the necessary resources for Key Skills coming through.
User friendliness Some schools had rewritten GNVQ Key Skills log books to simplify the language used and had produced their own Key Skills materials.	**User unfriendliness** The language in GNVQ Key Skills units was felt to be complex and convoluted and particularly unsuitable for students involved in GNVQ Part 1 pilots.
	The inappropriate levels of Key Skills in GNVQ, in some subjects, eg health and social care, and art and design, the level of the Key Skills was thought to be too high for some students. This was particularly the case for application of number and IT for GNVQ part 1.
Staff skills in the Key Skill areas and their understanding of the world of work.	**Lack of skills among some staff,** in the Key Skills themselves in order to be able to deliver and integrate them into subjects.
Staff commitment: persuade staff that Key Skills are happening anyway and that it is not just another new initiative.	**Staff attitudes:** a sense of initiative overload. In some schools there was concern that the workload to integrate Key Skills would not be shared evenly between staff, with the more committed teachers doing the majority of the work on integrating and mapping Key Skills.
'Collateral' All different parties involved: employers, schools and parents so that the messages students receive are consistent and the value of Key Skills are appreciated.	**Unclear messages from government.** Some schools do not want to put too much time and effort into Key Skills until they know how government sees Key Skills fitting into GCSE, 'A' level, higher education and lifetime learning.

Source: IES Survey 1998

GNVQ vs 'A' level students

Some of the respondents talked about the differences between 'A' level and GNVQ students. In many cases, GNVQ students were viewed as being more confident, committed and directed. They were also thought to be more employable, having better IT and communication skills, and better able to work in teams. It might be argued that GNVQ students are more confident or consider Key Skills more important when they begin a GNVQ and therefore have less distance to travel. However, many respondents noted the considerable development of the young people's Key Skills over the period of the GNVQ courses. As two respondents put it:

> *'They are independent learners, more committed and self-motivated. They can think on their feet. GNVQ puts the responsibility on them as opposed to 'A' level students who are spoon fed.'*
>
> *'A' level students can't use a computer, they are entrenched in the self-importance of their own subject with a very narrow view. They are less able to do presentations and they have less confidence. . . . You can see at open evenings, when GNVQ and 'A' level students give talks, the GNVQ students are much better. However, as a GNVQ teacher, I am probably biased.'*

However, as we noted above, this was thought to be due to the whole package of GNVQ and the mode of teaching, not just the Key Skills.

GNVQ vs. GCSE students

In one of the schools that was involved in GNVQ Part 1 pilots, teachers had begun to notice differences between the GNVQ and their fellow GCSE students. This was in terms of the GNVQ students' greater levels of self-motivation, ability to plan their own work, and understanding of the applicability of Key Skills. One teacher noted the benefits of GNVQ Part 1:

> *'They are coming out of their shells and have more access to computers than they would have otherwise.'*

Confidence

Both young people and teaching staff felt Key Skills helped to bolster confidence. As one respondent put it:

> *'Some who have failed GCSE Maths and English go into the sixth form. They do Key Skills as part of their GNVQs and change quite dramatically because they get to grips with the Key Skills.'*

The recognition of the skills young people have was also noted as a benefit which boosted self esteem and confidence:

> *'Key Skills reward them for what they can do.'*

Employability

Examples of how Key Skills development can improve the employability of young people were given by some respondents:

> *'Students go through GNVQs and come out being far more employable and flexible.'*

One teacher involved in GNVQs and Compact said:

> *'We are immensely proud of our students when employers say how they show themselves capable of doing so much and that they have a greater awareness of the world of work. Employers say the students are more confident and express themselves well.'*

Another school reported that they had had a telephone call from an employer looking for a student who could help out in the summer holidays on spreadsheets. Having introduced Key Skills initiatives to develop the students' skills:

> *'. . . there were immediately students who sprang to mind who we were confident could do this.'*

Understanding the world of work

In some cases it was reported to us that work on Key Skills can help students develop their understanding of the world of work and the skills required by employers. We highlighted in Chapter 2 the understanding and importance students placed on Key Skills.

Help with making career choices

Key Skills were noted as helping young people to understand themselves better and where their strengths and weaknesses lay. One student in particular felt that recording her progress in Key Skills had helped her with choosing her GCSE options. It was also felt that Key Skills helped when completing CVs, application forms, and presenting themselves at interviews.

Develop disciplines of recording and providing evidence

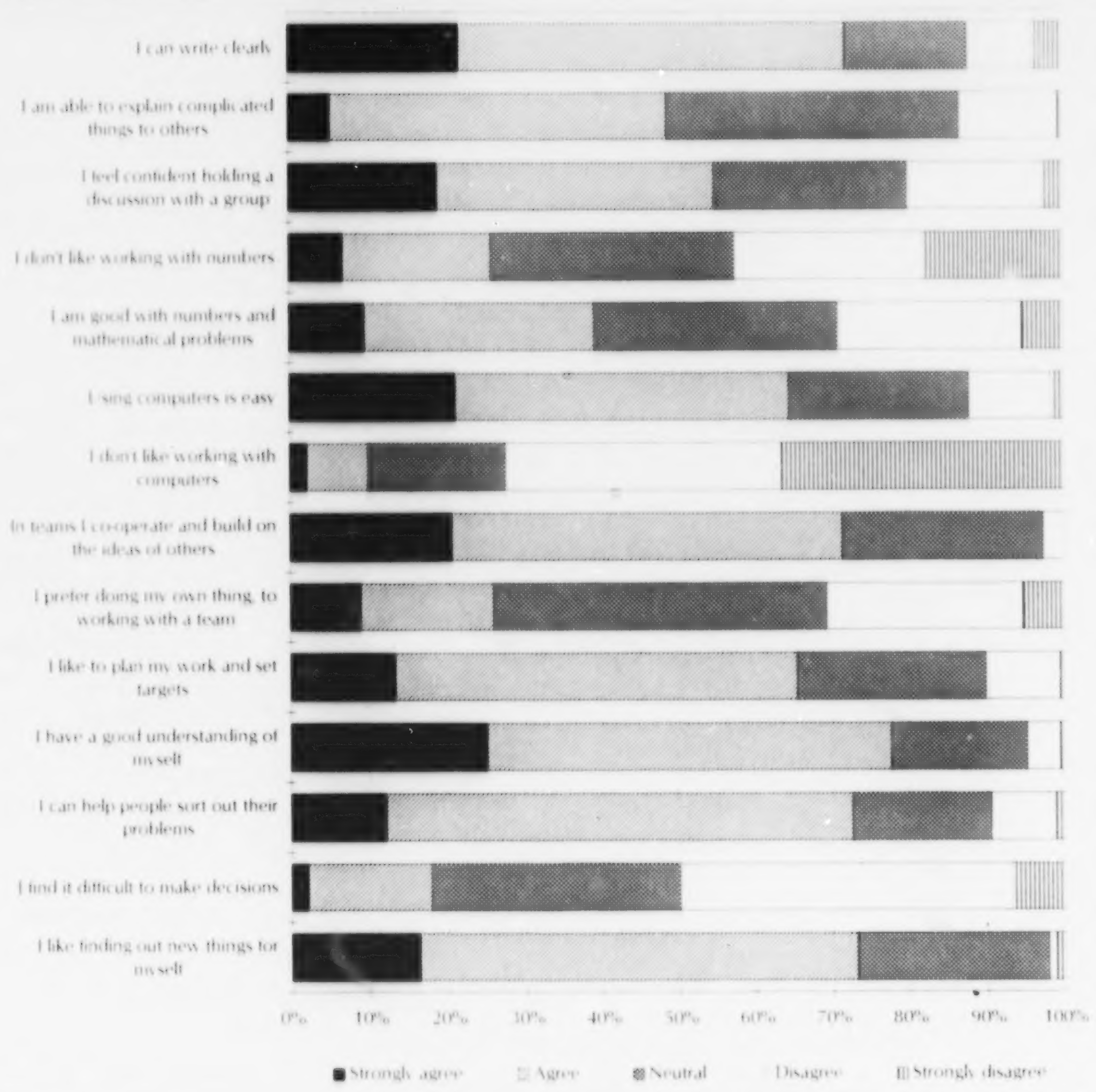
Students we spoke to mentioned benefits of working on their Key Skills, such as keeping work on track, being better organised and dealing with deadlines, and taking responsibility for the work they do. It was also felt that recording Key Skills helped with providing evidence to employers, writing CVs and completing UCAS forms.

4.5.1 The questionnaire survey

Data from the questionnaire survey of students provide some further insights into the impact of Key Skills. The survey attempted to determine students' confidence in each of the Key Skill areas. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of attitude statements relating to the skills. We show in Figure 4:1 the students' responses to these statements.

From the responses to these statements we have calculated some indicators of students' confidence in each of the Key Skills. The mean score for each Key Skill is shown in Table 4:5. The nearer the mean score is to five, the higher is the confidence of the students in this area. In this table, we have compared the differences in confidence between female and male students, and again our findings reflect traditional stereotypes. Males felt more confident with application of number and IT, females with written communication skills.

Figure 4:1 Students' confidence in Key Skills



Source: IES Student Survey

We have also compared those students who have gone through planned Key Skills activity, either in GNVQ or other programmes, such as Compact 2000, which cover the Key Skills. This shows that there is very little difference between the subsamples. Although those taking part in Key Skills programmes were slightly more confident in most of the Key Skills, these differences are not statistically significant. This does not necessarily mean that the programmes are not having an impact. These responses relate to confidence, rather than an objective assessment of ability. Students were also at varying stages in these programmes or courses. We show in Table 4:5 that post-16 students were also slightly more confident in some of the Key Skills than pre-16 students.

Table 4:5 Students' confidence in Key Skills (mean scores)

		Gender		**Qualifications or programmes working towards**		**Year**	
Key Skills	*All*	*Female*	*Male*	*GNVQ*	*Programmes covering Key Skills (inc. GNVQ)*	*Key Stage 4*	*Post-16*
Written communication skills	3.8	3.9	3.5	3.7	3.9	3.7	3.8
Oral communication skills	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.5
Application of number	3.2	2.9	3.6	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2
Information technology	3.8	3.7	4.1	4.0	3.9	4.0	3.8
Working with others	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.4	3.5
Improving own learning and performance	3.9	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.9
Problem solving	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.6
N = whole student sample	*190*	*112*	*78*	*83*	*122*	*55*	*127*

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score

Source: IES Student Survey

4.5 Challenges schools are facing

We conclude this chapter with some of the challenges respondents felt they were currently facing with regard to Key Skills. We summarise these below.

- Schools were in the very early stages of introducing Key Skills initiatives. The first stage was mapping what they do already, the next steps are to rewrite schemes of work to integrate Key Skills and to make linkages across the curriculum.
- Many schools felt they need longer lead in times. There was a feeling that Key Skills had been introduced before staff were fully up to speed.
- There is a continuing need to 'win hearts and minds' of staff and to equip staff to deliver Key Skills.
- A lack of resources, both time and funding, to spend on Key Skills, was perceived as presenting real difficulties. Teachers realised that that there should be more emphasis on Key Skills but felt they had no time to do it.
- Progression seems to be an issue needing to be tackled. As yet, few links had been made between different initiatives, courses or programmes taking place within schools at different stages.
- Many schools felt that messages from government in relation to Key Skills were unclear, and there was uncertainty about how this whole area would be taken forward.

5. Training Suppliers — Approaches to Delivery of Key Skills within Modern Apprenticeship Programmes

This section of the report considers the delivery of Key Skills within the Modern Apprenticeship framework. It draws from our findings from discussions with the ten training suppliers and some of their Modern Apprenticeship trainees.

It is required that the Key Skills of communication, application of number, information technology, working with others, and improving own learning and performance are delivered in Modern Apprenticeship programmes. Some suppliers also covered problem solving. The level of Key Skill required is defined by the awarding body and varies by occupational area.

This section of the report is presented in two chapters. In this chapter, we consider the approach to Key Skills taken by WESTEC's training suppliers. First, we discuss the objectives of delivering Key Skills and the value of Key Skills from the perspective of WESTEC's training suppliers. We then turn to look at the overall approaches to Key Skills. In the final section, we consider who is involved in the delivery of the Key Skills, *ie* tutors and assessors, the employers of Modern Apprentices and the trainees themselves, and their attitudes towards the Key Skills.

5.1 The training supplier survey

5.1.1 The fieldwork

The training suppliers visited covered a wide range of occupational areas, and included two colleges and two employers with direct contracts with SkillsLink West to deliver Modern Apprenticeships. Within the training organisations, we spoke to both senior members of staff, *ie* directors, operations managers and Key Skills co-ordinators, as well as instructors (tutors and assessors) and trainees. Any variation in views from the different types of staff are identified.

5.1.2 The questionnaire survey of trainees

A four page questionnaire was distributed to trainees in eight training suppliers. Twenty-five questionnaires were sent out to each training organisation, a total of 200, and 40 were returned.

This represents a response rate of 25 per cent. The survey was conducted during February and March 1998. The questionnaire was distributed and collected through training staff.

Our sample is unlikely to be representative of all trainees on Modern Apprenticeship programmes in the former Avon area. However, the aim of collecting the data was to provide some indication on students' views on Key Skills. We describe the characteristics of the sample below:

- 62 per cent female and 38 per cent male
- 97 per cent white
- 58 per cent aged between 16 and 19, 42 per cent over 20
- 58 per cent had been on the Modern Apprenticeship programme for less than a year, 41 per cent for over a year
- Occupations:
    - office based (administration, IT, accountancy): 18 per cent
    - personal and protective services (hairdressing, catering and hospitality): 35 per cent
    - mechanical and technical occupations (motor mechanics, engineering, agriculture and horticulture): 35 per cent
    - retail and other occupations (retail, estate agency and sports and recreation): 13 per cent.

5.2 Objectives of delivering Key Skills

The training suppliers we visited generally recognised the value of delivering Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeship programmes. Although when asked why they were delivering Key Skills, a common response was 'because we have to'. On further probing, most respondents did appear to appreciate the benefits of doing so. Typically, the objective of delivering Key Skills was viewed as being to equip trainees with the skills employers require and to ensure employers get a rounded person in the workplace who can communicate. For instance, as one training supplier put it:

> *'Key Skills training broadens their view and gives them a better insight into industry and the working world — the real world. It makes them aware.'*

5.2.1 The perceived value of Key Skills

The majority of our respondents recognised that the Key Skills are the generic skills which underpin the Modern Apprenticeship. It was thought that many of the Key Skills arise naturally in the training. In particular, improving own learning and performance was viewed as arising as a result of the overall mode of learning required in working towards an NVQ. Communication, working with others, and improving own learning and performance, were also often seen as central to the NVQs. The value of being explicit about the Key Skills was seen as making the trainees more aware of the things they can do.

In general, there was a commitment to Key Skills development at senior management or director level within the training organisations. However, some occupational tutors had reservations. In some occupations, for example in retailing and engineering manufacture, each Key Skill was seen as equal in value. For others, some Key Skills were viewed as less relevant. There were perceived to be problems with both the level and the breadth of some Key Skills. This is despite the fact that different level skills are required for different occupations. One response was:

> *'Key Skills can be too high and too vast.'*

We summarise some of the responses by sector below:

- In the **health and social care** sector, respondents had difficulty seeing the relevance of IT and application of number.

> *'In care, they do not touch a computer.'*

It was reported to us that this can present difficulties in motivating trainees where they do not use these skills in their current job at all. The Key Skills units are seen as presenting them with extra work to do for no reason.

- In the **hairdressing** and **catering and hospitality** sectors, some respondents had difficulty in seeing the relevance of IT and application of number. In contrast, problem solving, verbal communication skills, working with others, and improving own learning and performance, were seen as much more important in these occupational areas:

> *'Often trainees feel they did numbers in maths at school. They thought they had finished with it.'*
>
> *'Some of my trainees are not good at spelling and numbers — that's why they have come into hairdressing: they have practical skills.'*
>
> *'Problem solving is important — they need to be able to sort things out if something goes wrong with someone's hair.'*

- In **administration** it was reported that some of the application of number skill unit was not relevant and the level was too high, whereas communication and IT skills were seen as key to the occupation.

> *'We have a problem with Level 3 application of number for administration trainees — Level 2 would be better. Things like calculating the interquartile range, mean, median and mode, fractions, ratios and volume of cube are not appropriate to an admin. position.'*

- One **sport and recreation** supplier had difficulty in seeing the relevance of IT:

> *'They are not producing computer produced reports or making calculations on spreadsheet and databases etc. that they need to do for their Key Skills unit — if they were doing that, they should be on administration Modern Apprenticeship instead.'*

However, another took a different view. For them, the Modern Apprenticeship was clearly understood to be a training for supervisory or managerial roles, and for this each of the Key Skills was seen as valuable. We return to this point in our discussion below.

- **Motor vehicle.** Respondents in the motor vehicle maintenance sector generally saw the relevance of the Key Skills but thought application of number was set too high. As one trainer put it:

  > *'They have to do quite complex engineering calculations like ratios that they are unlikely to use afterwards.'*

- **Construction sector** respondents also saw some of the Key Skills as too educationally based. Problem solving, working with others and verbal communication skills were seen as vital. Basic skills were also perceived as important. The difficulty lay with application of number, written communication skills and IT. As one respondent explained, employees in a craft occupation in the sector would not necessarily deal with negative numbers or present information in the form of a pie chart. They would not be asked to make a presentation on a subject they are familiar with and one they are not. The respondent also had difficulty with IT, in that they felt that IT software packages would not be used in the construction industry for approximately five years. The point made was that if apprentices are trained in applications now and do not use them, the skills will be lost.

  > *'Trainees come into these occupations to do practical and physical things, quite a few have already experienced difficulties with those sorts of things you are required to do for the Key Skills and it's for that reason they turn to construction work. They want practical hands on work.'*

Our findings thus indicate that certain Key Skills have more resonance with tutors in certain occupations. To some extent this may indicate a misunderstanding of the Key Skills themselves. In particular it reflects a lack of recognition that the purpose of delivering Key Skills in these training programmes is to prepare trainees for roles they may progress to in future, such as managerial or supervisory positions, not just a training for their current job. In this respect, some of our respondents' understanding of Key Skills did not appear to be as developed as those of the Department for Education and Employment training supplier case study suppliers.[1] For example, our respondents did not all share the view illustrated by the following quote, regarding Key Skills:

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[1] Department for Education and Employment 1997, Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeships: Polly's Day Nursery, Bernard Griffiths Hairdressing, Five Rivers Project and Smiths Industries.

> '*. . . the clearest and most resonant connection may not be with functions in a specific job role. Modern Apprenticeships are a preparation for diverse career paths within industries. It may be necessary to look beyond the immediate job (either to other comparable job roles or to anticipate progression into supervisory or management roles) . . .*' (DfEE 1997, Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeships, 'Five Rivers Project' p.23)

Moreover, our training organisation responses reflect our research findings from employers. As we report in the following section, our employers also saw some Key Skills as more valuable than others, and looked for Key Skills which could be applied to the occupation or were vocationally specific.

A further point to make is that there were differing views among respondents about which groups of trainees had most to gain from Key Skills development. For instance, one supplier felt that their Modern Apprentices had very little to gain from the Key Skills. This training organisation was able to select trainees very carefully and they did not recruit any trainees who were not able very easily to get all the Key Skills at Level 3:

> '*Key Skills sound great but in reality all the Modern Apprentices who are recruited here have them already.*'

Another supplier reported having IT Modern Apprenticeship trainees with maths degrees, who had difficulty understanding why the application of number Key Skill elements could not be signed off automatically. However, again this may suggest some misunderstanding of this particular Key Skill or the scope to accredit prior learning.

One respondent felt that Key Skills development may be more important for trainees on Youth Credits or National Traineeships, *ie* those who have less well developed Key Skills, albeit at a lower level. A contrasting view was that it was people operating in supervisory or technical positions who need the Key Skills, but by the time they reached these positions and were using the Key Skills on a day-to-day basis, they were too old to be on a Modern Apprenticeship programme. It appears therefore that the perceived value of the Key Skills varies according to the calibre and position of the new entrants to the apprenticeships. We return to these points in our discussion of the impact of Key Skills development on Modern Apprenticeship trainees in Chapter 3.

5.3 Overall approach to delivering Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeship programmes

In this section, we consider the overall approach training suppliers were taking to deliver Key Skills. We go on to discuss specific learning and assessment activity in Chapter 3.

In general, training suppliers visited had not drawn up formal strategies on how Key Skills should be delivered. Instead, Key Skills appeared to be something suppliers had been grappling with over the previous 12 months and were now starting to 'get to grips with'. Practice was very much evolving rather than planned and the reason given for this was the limited lead in time for introducing Key Skills. Before going on to consider the method of delivering Key Skills two key points should be made:

1. The standard approach of private training suppliers to delivering Modern Apprenticeships is on-the-job training, together with some day release at the training company for portfolio building, one-to-one sessions with assessors to plan and review progress, and some group training sessions, where there is an identified need. Apprentices generally have employed status with an employer. This model differs slightly in colleges, where there may be more classroom based activity.
2. To a large extent Key Skills delivery is an assessment exercise, and identifying opportunities for assessment, rather than training, but this depends on the needs of the trainee. For example, an older trainee may have acquired a great deal towards their Key Skills already and would only need assessment, whereas a 16 year old may need more training.

5.3.1 'Bolt on' or integration

The main difference in approach to the Key Skills is whether they are integrated into training, assignments and assessment activities for the NVQ or 'bolted on' as a separate activity. We found examples of a broad spectrum of approaches. Practice varied from complete integration where trainees were actually not being made aware of some of the Key Skills, to tacking them on right at the end of the training programme. It appears that for the first batch of trainees who had Key Skills incorporated into their Modern Apprenticeship, the Key Skills had to be 'bolted on'. This was because the trainees were already part way through their training when the Key Skills were first introduced. However, it is now generally agreed that the most effective way of delivering Key Skills is to integrate them into the programme and most suppliers we spoke to were moving towards this approach. Table 5:1 overleaf presents training supplier views on the advantages and disadvantages of integrating and 'bolting on' Key Skills. This draws from both our own research findings and the DfEE Key Skills Case Studies (DfEE, 1997). We outline some examples of the different approaches below.

A typical mode of delivery is a combination of integrated and 'bolt on' activity, *eg* to integrate the Key Skills as much as possible and pick up at the end of the programme the elements which have not been covered, with some 'bolt on' activity. Case Study 1 provides an example of this combined approach. Even where Key Skills were entirely 'bolted on', it was recognised by the supplier

Table 5:1 Perceived advantages and disadvantages of 'bolting on' or integrating Key Skills into Modern Apprenticeship programmes

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Integration	Avoids extra work Ensures that training and assessment of Key Skills is relevant to the occupation Helps trainees appreciate relevance of Key Skills to the occupation Easier to identify opportunities to cover the Key Skills from the beginning of the programme May help trainees to take responsibility for their own learning, if they can identify opportunities to cover the Key Skills themselves	Can be a lot for the trainee to take on board at the beginning of their training programme Students may provide evidence which is not relevant May distort the training supplier if they do not sit easily with the NVQ (construction sector respondent only)
'Bolt on'	Not all Key Skills evidence can be collected in every workplace, so there may be a need to provide some top up activities to cover the Key Skills	Can present extra work Trainees may not appreciate relevance of Key Skills and may not take them seriously Comes across as an afterthought, or subordinate to the NVQ, resulting in tutors being cynical and trainees having difficult in finding time for them May be demotivating for trainee if Key Skills activity feels like school Can lead to repetition Good evidence gathering opportunities may be overlooked Development needs may not be identified until very late in the programme Can lead to drop out if Key Skills are covered at the very end of the programme after the NVQ has been achieved.

Source: IES Survey 1998 and DfEE 1997, Key Skills in Modern Apprenticeships

that this was probably not the best way to go about it, and some attempt was being made to integrate them. One training organisation outlined how they had moved towards integrating Key Skills:

> *'I used to tack them on the end but now I think you should introduce them from the start — and run NVQs and Key Skills in parallel. I used to think you take bits from completed NVQs and map them across but it's not easy — it needs to be thought out from the beginning.'*

Some of the suppliers integrated the Key Skills as far as possible; this was to avoid extra work for the trainee:

> *'The NVQ is difficult enough with a full-time job, so we make it as easy as possible.'*

This meant Key Skills development was very much assessor led and could entail a certain amount of 'spoon feeding' for the trainee, *ie* the training supplier identifying opportunities to assess the Key Skills. In some cases, this was done to such an extent that the trainee may not even be aware of the Key Skills. This may in fact mean that the trainee takes less responsibility for their own training and development, and has less of a sense of ownership of their training. One training supplier had recognised this as an issue and was working towards more actively involving trainees in the process.

Case Study 1 — Delivery of the Key Skills in Administration Modern Apprenticeship

This training supplier heavily integrated the Key Skills into the NVQ process. It was felt that improving own learning and performance and working with others arise from the NVQ anyway. There are also lots of opportunities to cover the communication key skill in the NVQ. Application of number is the only one that stands out as not really being part of the NVQ. This has implications for the introduction to Key Skills and for the language and jargon used. To try and overcome the problem with application of number, they have a series of assignments which the lead body have developed. Trainees come to the training supplier for training in application of number, and IT to top up. The other Key Skills are largely a bi-product of the NVQ process.

Thus, although it is recognised that the preferred method of delivery is to integrate Key Skills, this is not always possible. The extent to which Key Skills can be integrated appears to depend upon a number of factors which include:

- the opportunities available to gather Key Skills evidence in the workplace
- the tutor's or assessor's understanding of Key Skills
- the time available, *ie* one-to-one time with the training supplier to identify opportunities for assignments and assessments.
- guidance from the awarding body
- the timing of the introduction of the Key Skills
- support from the employer.

5.3.2 Connections with other initiatives

Respondents were asked to comment on any connection between Key Skills and any other initiative they may be involved with. The main point to make here is that few connections came to mind, and even when prompted, respondents had little to report. One training supplier who was working towards Investors in People (IiP), felt this made little difference to Key Skills delivery in their Modern Apprenticeships. However, it was thought that there were more links between Key Skills and IiP if the employer was working towards accreditation. IiP employers are likely to be more able to identify training needs and more likely to provide opportunities to develop the Key Skills, in particular improving own learning and performance and working with others.

Another supplier had come across some young people with National Records of Achievement (NRA), but these individuals were on Youth Credits rather than Modern Apprenticeships. They had found the NRA difficult to use and cross reference because of a lack of clarity about the syllabus or standard used by schools. Some connections were made with the introduction of Key Skills into National Traineeships and delivery of Pre-Vocational Training.

5.4 Who is involved in delivering Key Skills?

In this section we discuss who is involved in the delivery of Key Skills, tutors and assessors within training organisations, the employers of Modern Apprentices and the trainees themselves. For each group we consider attitudes towards and understanding of the Key Skills. We also discuss the training and support provided for tutors and assessors and employers' support and commitment to the Key Skills.

5.4.1 Equipping tutors and assessors to deliver Key Skills

Tutors and assessors reported that when Key Skills were first introduced to Modern Apprenticeships, there was a lot of concern about them. Many staff did not feel confident about their own Key Skills and their ability to deliver them. The Key Skills were also seen as presenting a lot of extra work. However, it now appears that the Key Skills are slowly being taken on board and attitudes towards them are changing. However, there remain pockets of lack of confidence and understanding of Key Skills, as the following quotes illustrate:

> *'I'm not confident about Key Skills. They are very difficult to interpret, as they are written in NVQ speak.'*

> *'Some trainers are better than others at the Key Skills work. The difference seems to be related to how confident they feel with Key Skills themselves.'*

Within the suppliers we visited, most tutors and assessors were involved in delivering all Key Skills, but in some cases there were also specialists in Key Skills such as application of number and IT. These specialists were used for advice and guidance.

Staff training and support

In terms of training and support provided to equip staff to deliver the Key Skills, there have been a mixture of formal and informal methods used. Case Study 2 provides an example of how one training organisation has built up expertise and confidence among staff in Key Skills delivery. Again, it appears that there has not been any overall plan in relation to equipping staff in Key Skills, but rather the training and support provided has been rather *ad hoc*. To a large extent tutors have 'learned by doing' and by sharing ideas among themselves. Some tutors have taken the initiative to develop their own Key Skills, for example by working through the GNVQ application of number unit. In most organisations, assessors help and support each other, hold workshops, meetings, and share experiences, knowledge and understanding:

> *'Everybody is helping everyone else. This is especially helpful as the Key Skills are so new and ambiguous.'*

> *'There is no training for assessors, we are just told we must be creative. At first everyone really worried about them.'*

Case Study 2 — Equipping Staff to Deliver Key Skills

Most staff training is in-house but some trainers have been on external courses for training tutors. The company recognises that if a trainer does not understand Key Skills, they cannot be expected to deliver and assess key skills. Now that they are 12 months down the line with delivering Key Skills, staff do feel more confident in delivering and assessing them. The awarding body has given help with understanding Key Skills and with training assessors. However, a great deal of support is gained from the assessors themselves with 'everybody helping everyone else', by sharing experiences. The training company have developed documents and logbooks for Key Skills. An information book and a set of tasks has been specifically designed for the application of number Key Skill which proves to be difficult to cover in the workplace. The awarding body have also just produced a set of assignments to cover all the Key Skills.

Training suppliers are now building up experience and a bank of background material and assignments which can be used. Staff have also drawn from resource materials produced by the awarding bodies. For example, the Hairdressing Training Board have drawn up a set of assignment to cover the Key Skills.

Some suppliers have also held formal half-day workshops on Key Skills or drawn upon in-house training teams. Training courses have also been offered by the awarding bodies, but it was reported that these vary in quality. Some respondents spoke very highly of the support provided by the awarding bodies, and in some cases external verifiers had visited training suppliers and helped to explain the terminology of the Key Skills. We heard of one example where an external verifier and the awarding body had helped to draw up a bank of Key Skill assignments, designing induction sessions and assessment systems. Training suppliers told us that they welcomed the support provided by WESTEC but generally felt that it had been a bit slow in coming:

> *'WESTEC are running a workshop next week. We have been running Key Skills for a year now — it's a bit late.'*

However, it was felt that any training and support should be continuous and ongoing. Tutors reported that they would like more opportunities to share ideas on best practice both within and across organisations. We have been informed that since the research was undertaken the situation has changed and more support is being provided.

Some tutors and assessors we interviewed were working towards Key Skills units themselves. In one organisation, each tutor was to be qualified to the Key Skill level they were delivering. In another, the target was for each assessor to reach Level 5 in each Key Skill. One organisation was particularly interested in a new Key Skills assessor qualification.

5.4.2 Employers' role in the delivery of Key Skills

Broadly our training suppliers fell into two categories:

- those who felt employers of Modern Apprentices had a good understanding and were supportive of Key Skills, and
- those who complained that employers did not understand, and were not supportive in providing opportunities for developing and assessing these skills.

This variation seems to be linked with the nature of the relationship between the supplier and employer. Those suppliers who had built up a close relationship with their Modern Apprenticeship employers were able to ensure that the employers had a full commitment to the training programme and the Key Skills elements of it. The suppliers who had a close relationship with their employers emphasised the importance of maintaining this contact and support. As one respondent put it: 'we are quite ruthless with the ones not committed to Key Skills'. Another reported that because they had a very high demand for their Modern Apprenticeship places, they were able to select only those trainees with employers who were supportive of their training.

This group of suppliers were sometimes able to work in partnership with their employers to identify training needs of the apprentice and provide learning and assessment opportunities for the Key Skills. It was reported that one employer attended the trainees' assessments. This supplier built up and maintained the relationship with the employers by ensuring there was one point of contact within the training organisation for each employer, so there is continuity and consistency. They also offered a training advice and consultancy service for the employer. In most cases, however, even among the committed employers, the support provided was simply providing time for the trainee to develop the Key Skills and an understanding of the need for them. It was felt that employers generally placed responsibility for Key Skills training with the supplier.

More than half of the suppliers, however, were dissatisfied with the support and understanding employers were able to provide. For some, the issue was a lack of understanding of the Key Skills on the part of the employer:

> *'They don't see it as a training issue. They think you either have these skills or not, or that perhaps they come with age — that it is the sort of attitude.'*

For others, it was a lack of commitment and support for the trainee in terms of providing opportunities or time to develop the Key Skills:

> *'We have great difficulty convincing employers that if they want the trainee certified they have to do the Key Skills.'*

> *'Employers want Key Skills but they are not putting themselves out for it.'*

This often means that trainees have to gather evidence or come into the training supplier in their own time, and there is insufficient time for the trainees to meet with their assessors. There was also a feeling among some suppliers that employers were not using the Modern Apprenticeship process to its full potential and that they could get much more out of it. We return to these points in our discussion of barriers to effective delivery of Key Skills in Chapter 6.

5.4.3 Trainees' attitudes towards and understanding of Key Skills

In relation to trainees' attitudes towards Key Skills we can draw from both the findings from the questionnaire survey of trainees and group interviews.

Questionnaire survey

As with the student survey, trainees responding to the questionnaire were asked to rank the importance of each of the Key Skills for their occupation on a scale of one to five, with one corresponding to 'not at all important' and five, 'very important'. We show in Table 5:2 their responses to this question. We can see that the majority of trainees ranked all the Key Skills as either 'very important' or 'important'. However, application of number and IT were seen as the least important. These are the two Key Skills which employers also rated as slightly less important. Oral communication skills, working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving, were seen as the most important Key Skills. The WESTEC Employers Survey (Prism Research Ltd, 1997) found that of all the Key Skills, employers were most satisfied with young people's abilities in teamworking and willingness to learn. It is also interesting to note that trainees considered written communication skills and IT as considerably less important, and

Table 5:2 Trainees' views on importance of Key Skills

			Occupation			
	All		Office based	Personal & protective services	Mechanical & technical	Retail & other
Key Skills	v. important/ important (%)	Mean score	Mean score	Mean score	Mean score	Mean score
Written communication skills	75	4.3	4.1	4.1	4.3	4.6
Oral communication skills	88	4.5	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.8
Application of number	65	4.0	3.4	3.8	4.5	4.0
Information technology	58	3.8	4.5	3.0	4.3	3.6
Working with others	88	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.6
Improving own learning and performance	93	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.7	5.0
Problem solving	90	4.5	4.1	4.2	4.8	4.6
N = whole trainee sample	*40*	*40*	*7*	*14*	*14*	*5*

Source: IES Trainee Survey

improving own learning and problem solving as more important, than respondents in schools. This might suggest that the relevance of the latter two skills comes to be understood as young people enter employment and with age.

We must be cautious in our analysis of the sample by occupational area, because of the small numbers involved. However, reflecting the views of the training suppliers, trainees' perceptions of the importance of IT and application of number appear to vary considerably by occupational area. These skills were seen as important by trainees in mechanical and technical occupations, and the importance of IT in office based occupations was also clearly recognised. Those working in personal and protective services saw these skill areas as considerably less important. Again mirroring the trainers' views, number was seen as less relevant for those in administrative occupations. As might be expected, for engineering and mechanical positions, the importance of problem solving was recognised.

In Table 5:3 we have analysed the trainee sample by gender. As with the student survey, male trainees rated application of number, IT, and problem solving as more important than females. This reflects the occupational distributions, with a higher proportion of males in mechanical and technical occupations. Our analysis of the sample by length of time in training shows an unclear picture. With some of the skills, it appears that there is an increase in the perceived importance the longer the trainees had been in training, but in others not. The findings suggest, however, that those who had been in training a very short time had less of an appreciation of the importance of the skills, but

Table 5:3 Trainees' views on importance of Key Skills (mean scores)

		Gender		Key Skills assessed	
Key Skills	**All**	**Female**	**Male**	**Yes**	**No**
Written communication skills	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.2
Oral communication skills	4.5	4.3	4.6	4.5	4.6
Application of number	4.0	3.3	4.4	4.1	3.2
Information technology	3.8	3.5	4.0	4.0	3.0
Working with others	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.4
Improving own learning and performance	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.6	5.0
Problem solving	4.5	3.9	4.8	4.5	4.2
N = whole trainee sample		*15*	*25*	*26*	*5*

Source: IES Survey

our sample size prohibits any in-depth analysis into this issue. We show in Table 5:3 that those who have had their Key Skills assessed rated the skills as more important than those who had not, but again the small numbers involved mean that we should exercise caution in our interpretation of these data.

Group interviews

Findings from our discussions with trainees suggest that a number of factors appear to influence trainees' attitudes towards Key Skills. These include:

- how far they have progressed in their training programme
- the amount of work they have done on Key Skills
- whether the Key Skills are integrated or delivered separately to their NVQ
- their occupation
- how the Key Skills have been introduced to them.

How far trainees have progressed in their training and their Key Skills units

Trainees interviewed who were relatively inexperienced and at the very early stages of their training programme, clearly had a limited understanding of Key Skills. We came across some examples of trainees who barely understood the term 'Key Skills' and were only able to list one or two of the Key Skills. Others who were further into their training and had worked towards attaining their Key Skills had a clearer understanding, and encouragingly we came across responses from trainees, such as:

> *'They* [Key Skills] *are the underpinning skills of everything.'*

> '*We will use them* [Key Skills] *in the future to run our own garages or businesses.*'

> '*They* [Key Skills] *are all the sorts of things you need to get through life. They are like the core subjects at school: maths and English.*'

The more experienced Modern Apprenticeship trainees were also better able to identify where they used Key Skills and the opportunities to develop them both in and outside work. For example, for communication skills trainees spontaneously cited things like participating in meetings and relaying instructions, for example when using a fork lift truck. For working with others an example given was:

> '*If I go on a breakdown I would need to get on with the other person and together work out what the problem was.*' (engineering manufacture trainee)

Another trainee was able to see the relevance of each of his Key Skills to his hobby of snooker playing: improving own learning and performance as he is learning and improving his game all the time; communication as he often referees matches and needs to communicate well in this sort of role; working with others as when he referees they do so in a team; application of number as he has to work out scores, add up points and do the marking; and IT, as when refereeing he has to report on matches and complete documentation which he completes on a computer.

As would be expected, the further into their Modern Apprenticeship the trainees were, the more confident they felt about their own Key Skills competence.

Integrated or 'bolted on'

Whether the Key Skills are integrated or 'bolted on' to the training programme does appear to have a clear influence on the value placed on them by the trainees. Generally, trainees shared the view with their tutors that it was better to integrate the Key Skills into their NVQ work where possible. Where the Key Skills were integrated, the young people were more likely to grasp the relevance. However, as we noted above, in some cases the approach to delivering Key Skills was very much assessor led with little involvement of the trainee in the process. This could mean that the trainee had little awareness of the skills.

Those whose Key Skills were delivered separately often saw them as difficult, time consuming and not relevant to what they were doing currently, or what they wanted to do in the future. They were also less able to identify when they used their Key Skills, either in their current or previous job or outside work. They also found that they overlapped with each other and could be quite repetitive.

> *'They will be important in future, but at the moment they are just more stuff to do.'*
>
> *'For IT we have to learn packages we don't need at the moment, we might need them later but by then we will have forgotten how.'*
>
> *'Apprentices don't see it* [Key Skills] *as relevant and not part of what they want to do or need to do in their chosen work.'*

However, interestingly, one group of trainees at a college thought that Key Skills should be taught separately from the NVQ. This was so they could concentrate on the Key Skill in a more structured way. They felt that they did not have time to do the NVQ or the Key Skill satisfactorily. A few suggested that having separate group lessons in IT would be useful.

Occupational area

Reflecting the points made in Section 5.1, the importance trainees placed on Key Skills to some extent varied according to occupation. For example, some of the hairdressing, childcare, and health and social care trainees were less able to see the relevance of IT and application of number. In contrast, a retailing trainee saw all the Key Skills as relevant to their work. Some motor vehicle trainees thought Key Skills were useful but that application of number was set too high for what they would need in work.

How the Key Skills are introduced

As one supplier put it, the 'good sales pitch up front' ensures that young people see Key Skills as part of the Modern Apprenticeship programme and know that they will be doing things that occur naturally in their work. In this way, young people do not see Key Skills as extra work. Many young people worry about application of number as they feel they would not normally cover this in work. They also worry about the presentation element of communication. How these Key Skills are introduced to trainees is therefore seen as particularly important.

Having provided an overview of how training suppliers have approached Key Skills, in Chapter 6 we consider how the Key Skills are delivered in practice.

6. Training Suppliers — Delivery of Key Skills in Practice

We begin this chapter with a discussion of how Key Skills are delivered in Modern Apprenticeship programmes, drawing out examples of effective practice. This is followed by a discussion of some of the barriers and problems training suppliers encounter in developing trainees' Key Skills. We consider the transition from education to training and how well developed the Key Skills of new entrants to training programmes are. The final section of the chapter considers perceptions of the impact of Key Skills development on young people, and we conclude by discussing what more could be done to complement existing activity.

6.1 Introduction of Key Skills to Modern Apprentices

6.1.1 Recruitment to the Modern Apprenticeship programme

The skills and abilities trainees bring with them on entry to a Modern Apprenticeship programme clearly have an influence on the capability of trainees to attain the Key Skills units of their training. Some of the training organisations had developed methods of assessing the Key Skills of new entrants to their training programmes. One in particular used a computer package (SkillScan) to assess the skills of potential recruits, and another was considering introducing a test to assess application of number on recruitment. Another explained that they were very careful about recruitment. They would not accept trainees who were aged under 18 on to their programmes, as it was thought younger trainees lacked the required maturity for a Modern Apprenticeship. They also ensured that trainees had the ability to attain all the Key Skills at the required level. This was assessed through school exam results and interviewing. One supplier stressed the importance of the recruits' improving own learning and performance skills. They would not recruit any Modern Apprenticeship trainees who did not have highly developed skills and motivation in this area. However, it should be noted that this was not common practice across all training suppliers surveyed, and in fact WESTEC's funding policy encourages Modern Apprenticeships to be focused on those aged under 18.

Some respondents noted that it was important to ascertain whether the recruits had the scope to operate at Level 3 in their job, that they knew what was expected, and that they had the

89

full support of their employer. The importance of recruiters understanding the Modern Apprenticeship programme and the Key Skills was also emphasised.

However, not all of our respondents exercised such rigorous selection methods, and some reported that they were less able to be so selective, as illustrated by the following response:

> *'Training suppliers with the best rapport with employers, schools and TECs get the best trainees. The rest pick up the rest. This why some have a problem.'*

In one supplier, trainers who were not involved in the recruitment process thought some trainees were taken on to the Modern Apprenticeship programme without consideration of their ability to meet the NVQ and the Key Skills requirements. Another supplier explained that they had two types of trainees on their Modern Apprenticeship programmes: those who arrive fully competent at Key Skills already and those who do not have the skills at all and would need years of training to attain them. It was felt that these trainees should not be on Modern Apprenticeships and they had been recruited badly. This led to the problem of a high rate of 'drop out' from the training programme.

6.1.2 When and how Key Skills are introduced to trainees

When and how Key Skills are introduced to trainees was also identified as an important issue by our respondents. Some of the training suppliers ran an induction session on Key Skills at the start of the training programme. This would be either to a group or on a one-to-one basis, depending on how many trainees would be starting on a training programme at any one time. The kind of things these sessions would cover would be what the Key Skills are, why they are important and how they will be assessed.

It was pointed out that it was important not to present the Key Skills in a such a way that they may come across as daunting. Most trainees were introduced to the Key Skills by their official names but some of the terminology was adapted. It appears that training suppliers try to introduce the Key Skills to trainees gently, as illustrated by the following examples:

> *'The names and titles can frighten trainees off. In the past we referred to the Key Skills by their names. Now we tell trainees they will come out naturally in the NVQ process except for application of number. They are told that 70 per cent of the Key Skills will be covered in the NVQ and the rest will be picked up later.'*

> *'We sit down together and go through the standards. We are supposed to go through the whole thing but it's too much so I just summarise the Key Skills. For example "you've got to do five Key Skills, one is communication and the worst thing you have to do is a presentation".'*

One supplier had in the past very much 'played down' the Key Skills in their Modern Apprenticeship induction. Delivery was very much assessor led and the Key Skills were heavily integrated into the programme. However, they were now beginning to recognise that this inhibits the young person taking responsibility for their own learning and discourages a sense of ownership. They were now redesigning their induction approach to be more explicit about the Key Skills.

Some suppliers undertake an assessment of the trainees' Key Skills at this initial stage of the programme to identify any training needs. It is also at this stage that any accreditation of prior learning takes place, *eg* evidence of Key Skills from a degree or previous employment. However, not all the suppliers accredit prior learning. This could mean that young people are having to work on Key Skills they already have. For instance, we found cases of trainees with degrees in Maths being asked to do a pie chart for their application of number Key Skill.

After an initial introduction to Key Skills, the next time trainees come across the Key Skills is in one-to-one sessions with their assessors. Some are provided with a Key Skills log book or a Key Skills pack at the outset; others leave it until later on in the programme. Some suppliers felt that it was better to leave the Key Skills until trainees had progressed some way into their work and training, and they had gained confidence. One supplier in particular took a different approach and left the introduction of Key Skills to much later in the training programme. Work towards the Key Skills were not started until the trainees had reached their NVQ Level 2 and when they had got used to portfolio building and gathering evidence. This was also when they were operating at a higher level in their job and were more mature. This trainer felt the Key Skills were too daunting to try to cover at the preliminary stages of training.

6.2 Activities and assignments for developing and assessing Key Skills

Respondents were asked to provide examples of projects or activities used to develop or assess the Key Skills. The activities described were generally used for assessing the Key Skills rather than developing them, and as such were more of an evidence gathering opportunity rather than a development tool. In this section we provide some examples of these activities.

In general, the projects or assignment described to us fell into three categories:

- naturally occurring events at work
- extended or adapted naturally occurring events, and
- relevant simulations or realistic projects.

Where possible these activities are workplace assignments, tasks or activities which the trainer identifies as meeting the Key Skills criteria. Some of the examples trainers gave arose naturally out of the trainees' work, *ie* they were something they were doing at work anyway. Often these projects would cover a number of the Key Skills. Case Studies 3 and 4 provide examples of work based projects being used to meet the Key Skills criteria.

Case Study 3 — Project Used to Assess Key Skills in Childcare Modern Apprenticeship

A childcare trainee was involved in setting up a day nursery in her work, the tasks she was carrying out included: identifying a building, designing and distributing marketing leaflets (communication and IT), writing a health and safety policy, organising an open day for potential clients (working with others), conducting a meeting with social services for registration (communication), looking at the heating requirements, buying equipment and measuring building for decorating, and calculating the staff to pupil ratio (application of number). This project was part of the trainee's work.

Case Study 4 — Project Used for Assessing Key Skills in Retailing Modern Apprenticeship

Create a new display for tropical fish: design a structure (problem solving), calculate water temperatures, chemicals required, the density of fish in the tank and the cost of the new display (application of number).

As one assessor reported, often the individual is doing activities that meet the Key Skills criteria but not to the actual level required. In these instances, the assessor works with the trainee to adapt the project to fit the Key Skills. An example of this type of activity is given in Case Study 5.

Case Study 5 — Project Used for Assessing Key Skills in Administration Modern Apprenticeship

Conducting a staff social event survey and then arranging an event. This involved producing a report, presenting the outcome, booking and arranging the activity. The initial stages of the project were good for application of number and IT. The whole project was also good for communication, as the process involved continual feedback.

It was generally agreed by our respondents that the activities which worked the best were those for which the students saw the relevance. These were projects which were closely related to or covered by the trainees' work or their work towards their NVQ, for example sales training for a sport and recreation Modern Apprenticeship. However, sometimes it is not always possible to identify these types of opportunities. This can be because the trainee is not conducting tasks within the workplace at the required level, or the employer does not allow the time or resources for the projects to take place:

> *'It can be difficult to arrange some situations, for example to speak to a stranger about a subject they know nothing about — so some situations have to be fixed up.'*

Some assessors reported that they had been able to develop simulated projects which were closely related to the trainee's work, although not something which would have naturally arisen. An example of this is provided in Case Study 6. Projects vary in length and may range from small and short term tasks or assignments to long term practical projects covering a wide range of Key Skills and NVQ elements.

Case Study 6 — Project Used for Assessing Key Skills in Motor Vehicle Maintenance Modern Apprenticeship

Redesign the employer's workshop, identifying problems with the existing layout and improving these (problem solving), measuring space and equipment (application of number), presenting how and why the workshop was redesigned in such as way (communication).

Projects described to us were typically identified by the tutor working with the trainee in one-to-one sessions. However, it appears that in most cases the ideas for such projects come from the tutor more than the apprentice.

In some instances, it was not possible to identify work related projects, and then the Key Skills had to be delivered as a separate or 'bolted on' activity. As we noted in Chapter 2, it can be difficult to cover the application of number Key Skill in an Administration Modern Apprenticeship. Suppliers had, in some cases, developed a set of assignments to cover the Key Skill. One respondent reported that:

> *'If all else fails we'll use a GCSE maths book.'*

Information Technology was also often covered off-the-job. For example, for engineering manufacture trainees, IT was covered by a series of workshops at the training supplier's premises.

As noted above, these activities were generally used as assessment rather than development opportunities. Some suppliers formally assessed training needs and were in a position to provide any necessary training to fill a skills gap, for example a course in communicating by telephone or presentation skills. The colleges and one of the private training suppliers took a more active role in providing training where needed, in particular in IT and application of number, which were less likely to arise naturally in the NVQ. Identification of training needs would take place during one-to-one sessions with the trainees and the drawing up of assessment logs. Others were hoping to provide such courses in future, but did not at the time of the survey. We turn to consider the assessment of Key Skills in more detail in the following section.

6.2.1 The questionnaire survey

Trainees were asked about where they had the opportunity to develop their Key Skills. We show in Table 6:1 their responses to this question. This table details the percentage of trainees who felt the activities at the top of the table had helped them to develop the Key Skills. A number of points can be drawn from these data:

- For most trainees, their job appeared to provide the most opportunities for developing Key Skills, followed by training delivered externally.
- The four Key Skills which were considered to be the most important by trainees (oral communication skills, working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving) were most likely to be thought to be developed at work. In contrast, externally provided training appeared to provide more opportunities to develop application of number, written communication skills, and IT.
- Less than half of trainees felt they had had the opportunity to develop their Key Skills through training at work. This would suggest that many trainees were not receiving this type of training.
- The extent to which trainees have developed their Key Skills through their hobbies is largely similar to that of the students.
- It is interesting to note that low proportions (between one-quarter and one-half) of trainees felt that they had developed these skills at school. These are much lower percentages than those shown in the survey of students currently at school. This might suggest that schools in the past have not sufficiently focused on Key Skills, but perhaps this situation is beginning to change.

Table 6:1 Opportunities to develop Key Skills (trainees' views) (per cent)

Key Skills	In my job	Training at work	Training at college/external training supplier	Hobbies/leisure activities	At school
Written communication skills	55	33	68	10	33
Oral communication skills	78	38	63	45	38
Application of number	53	33	60	15	48
Information technology	48	25	60	20	35
Working with others	93	50	55	43	30
Improving own learning and performance	78	48	58	35	25
Problem solving	83	40	63	28	25
N = whole trainee sample (multiple responses allowed)	*40*	*40*	*40*	*40*	*40*

Source: IES Survey

6.3 Assessment of Key Skills

Sixty-five per cent of the trainees responding to the questionnaire survey had so far had had some of their Key Skills assessed. Assessors work with Modern Apprenticeship trainees to identify and discuss suitable assessment opportunities for the Key Skills. Our respondent private training suppliers regularly visited their trainees in the workplace. The frequency of such visits varied from once per week to once per month. Case Study 7 provides an example of a typical visit. Case Study 8 provides an example of how assessment takes place within a college. Typically, it was reported that trainees were given assessment plans which were completed by the trainee together with their tutor. As we have already noted, it appears that it is the assessor who takes the more active role in identifying assessment opportunities, but they will also work with the trainee and employer. In some of the suppliers surveyed, assessment was tailored around the needs of the employer. In others, the employer's only involvement was to support a work based assessment activity.

Case Study 7 — Assessor Visit to an Engineering Manufacture Trainee

At a typical visit, the Modern Apprentice would bring his or her NVQ portfolio and log book (really a sort of technical diary) and the assessor would bring his tracking file. They would both review an action sheet that had been developed in the previous visit. The action sheet would focus on certain skill units and on collecting certain pieces of evidence. At the end of the visit another action sheet will be drawn up for the trainee to work on before the next visit. The drawing up of the action sheet is usually a joint effort between assessor and the trainee but this really depends on how well the visit went, the motivation of the apprentice, and their understanding of the Key Skills and the assessment process.

Training suppliers reported that they tended to take a flexible approach in terms of the order in which the Key Skills units and elements were assessed. This was fitted around the needs of the trainee and the employer. For example, a trainee may wish to tackle the Key Skills they feel they will find easier first, or an employer may require that a particular Key Skill is assessed at a specific time. If the Key Skills were heavily integrated into the NVQ, the order in which Key Skills was covered was determined by the NVQ training. In many cases, this meant that IT and application of number were 'bolted on' at the end.

Assessment activities ranged from workplace based tasks or projects which the trainee is conducting as part of their job, to projects or assignments designed by the training supplier. Some of the suppliers we visited also looked at what the trainee did outside work as well. One training supplier used application of number tests for trainees where the use of number did not arise in the course of the trainee's work. The assessment of a work based activity may take the form of an observation of the trainee carrying out their work. For example, a sport and recreation

Modern Apprentice conducts an induction session with a new member of a gym and draws up an exercise plan. Projects are generally assessed through provision of written up evidence. Diaries or log books may be used to gather evidence.

Often the way a bank of assessment activities had been built up within the supplier, the evidence collection process and requirements, can be quite prescriptive. For example, for an IT assignment, it may be stipulated that printouts are provided of formulae used in a spreadsheet.

In terms of documentation, suppliers have developed a range of systems for cross referencing and recording evidence. Things such as evidence reference sheets are used, as with the NVQ, and log sheets or candidate assessment records to record evidence. Our respondents reported that where the Key Skill standard had not been met this would be fed into the assessment plan. Cross referencing between the NVQ portfolio and Key Skills assessment can be complex. It was reported to us that, in many cases, the supplier did this on behalf of the trainee, as trainees often found difficulties with doing the cross referencing themselves. Index or matrix systems tend to be used for cross referencing. We found evidence of a lot of expertise in cross referencing having been built up among individual training staff, although often this would not be documented. Many of the suppliers were still in the process of refining their systems at the time of the survey, as they were finding current systems cumbersome and time consuming.

Case Study 8 — Assessment in College

The motor vehicle trainees always spend two hours of the college day doing Key Skills. The tutor goes through the trainees folders picking out assignments and ticking the NVQ and the Key Skills elements. Some days trainees may spend a whole day on Key Skills if they have a lot to cover. The tutor makes sure everything has been covered before the portfolios are submitted.

6.4 Factors which contribute to effective delivery of Key Skills

In summary, examples of effective practice were those where:

- Trainees are recruited well, so that they have an understanding of what is expected of them, they have a sufficient level of Key Skill on recruitment, they are motivated, they have the opportunity to operate in their work at a level appropriate to their training, and they have the support of their employer.
- The Key Skills are introduced at an early stage in the programme, and are made explicit to the trainee and employer. How they are explained to the employer and trainee is important, *ie* the importance and relevance of the Key Skills is understood.

- A range of learning experiences and assessment activities are used to suit the needs of the trainee and employer. Activities which work best are those which are relevant to the job.
- Training suppliers have learnt from mistakes. For example, now they no longer leave Key Skills to the end of the training programme but integrate them.
- Training suppliers have built up expertise and materials to support the delivery of Key Skills, identify opportunities for Key Skills activities, and cross reference with the NVQ.
- The programme puts the trainee in charge of their own learning, and the trainee has an active role in identifying learning and assessment opportunities.
- The trainee has the full support of their employer.

6.5 Barriers and problems which training suppliers encounter in delivering Key Skills

In many cases, training suppliers had encountered difficulties or barriers to delivering Key Skills effectively.

6.5.1 Lack of skills among new trainees

The level of Key Skills of the candidates accepted onto Modern Apprenticeships can act as a major barrier to delivering Key Skills within the programmes. As we noted above, some of the suppliers had accepted trainees on to their programmes who do not have Key Skills or even basic skills and would need years of training to attain them. Examples of responses were:

> *'We can't train in six months what they haven't learned in 11 years at school.'*
>
> *'We have a candidate with literacy and numeracy problems and another candidate with behavioural problems — these should not have being doing Modern Apprenticeships.'*
>
> *'Some trainees accepted on the Modern Apprenticeship are not very competent at Key Skills or even basic skills. On the Modern Apprenticeship some of the Key Skill levels are quite high, eg Level 3 working with others for motor vehicle students — in the old days these students would have got their City and Guilds in motor vehicle maintenance but the Key Skills are at quite a high level.'*

This has implications for the training required and the time and resources needed for each candidate. It can lead to a serious problem of trainees not completing their training and some of the suppliers felt they had a high rate of non-completion because of this.

A lack of understanding of the relevance of the Key Skills was also identified as a barrier. A resistance towards application of number or number phobia was a common problem. Some suppliers noted a short sightedness among some trainees, for example among those who were not interested in progressing their career and therefore could not see the relevance of Level 3 Key Skills.

6.5.2 Lack of skills among staff and assessors

A lack of ability among vocational trainers and tutors, and not having the necessary Key Skills themselves to teach, train and develop Key Skills, clearly acts as a barrier. However, most suppliers felt that they were beginning to build up this expertise.

6.5.3 Difficulties identifying opportunities to deliver the Key Skills

We have already noted that in certain situations, and for some occupational areas, there are difficulties in identifying learning and assessment opportunities for the Key Skills which are relevant to the trainee's work or NVQ. Examples of responses were:

> *'Application of number and some of IT do not sit easily within the NVQ — these need artificial situations which go against the whole point of the modern apprenticeship.'*
>
> *'I have difficulty collecting evidence for working with others and improving own learning Key Skills because the examples given* (in the Key Skills book) *are biased and not relevant to my job.'*
>
> *'You need a supervisory element in your job to get Level 3 Key Skills and that is difficult for most Modern Apprentices who are younger and less experienced.'*

6.5.4 Lack of support from employers

Some suppliers felt that employers were not interested in providing opportunities to develop or assess Key Skills. In some cases, the general attitude to training of the employer was seen as a barrier. Some respondents reported that employers were not interested in getting involved in the Key Skills training and were not aware of the Key Skills. As a result, work based learning or assessment activities could not be used to a full extent.

6.5.5 Insufficient time

A lack of time provided by the employer for training was also an issue identified. In some instances, this meant trainees had to see their tutor in their own time. Suppliers also noted that they had a limited amount of time to get apprentices through their training, which meant they could not give each trainee the time they would like. Time pressures can clearly inhibit the process of identifying training and assessment opportunities:

> *'Catching things at the time and seeing things that can count or be cross referenced comes with time and experience. It's all about catching things in time.'*

In one of the colleges, lack of time was a major issue. Motor vehicle and hairdressing apprentices were only in college one day a week, and on that day they had to cover theory and practice work for their NVQ. Trainers at the college complained that Key Skills were very time consuming.

6.5.6 Difficulties with interpreting the language of Key Skills

Both trainees and instructors we spoke to found the language of Key Skills in the Modern Apprenticeships complicated. This often necessitated translation into simpler language for both staff and trainees. This can discourage trainees from taking charge of their own learning. Some found that the Key Skills were ambiguously worded, and needed time and effort to work out exactly what is expected. One supplier had difficulty interpreting the standard required for some of the Key Skills:

> *'"Individual must discuss a complex subject" — what is complex? Is there a standardisation issue here across occupational areas?'*
>
> *'"Margin of error" — I would like guidelines on what you can allow for silly mistakes in application of number.'*

Some trainees had difficulty using the Key Skills documentation. For example, one trainee did not find the Key Skills book provided by the supplier straightforward to use:

> *'It almost tries too hard to explain things and this can in fact make it more confusing. It breaks down everything into too much detail. It gives too many examples in too much and very specific detail.'*

This trainee felt this often made him think the evidence needed was much more difficult to gather than it actually was.

6.5.7 Lack of funding

Funding pressure and lack of clarity over funding was noted by many of the suppliers. One supplier noted that because funding is related to outcome, they have to push as many candidates through the system as possible. Another was operating at a loss in delivering Modern Apprenticeships as a result of funding cuts. Another was no longer able to train assessors, and to set up systems and processes to support Key Skills delivery, because of funding cuts.

Other barriers to the effective delivery of Key Skills mentioned were a high rate of staff turnover in some sectors (in particular sport and recreation), which meant trainees did not complete their training. Funding cuts which have been passed on from WESTEC is also an issue. Insufficient access to computer hardware and the incompatibility of workplace systems with those of the training supplier was also noted by two of the respondents.

6.6 How well schemes operated by schools and training suppliers complement each other

One objective of the study was to evaluate how well the schemes operated by schools, colleges, training suppliers and employers complement each other. We have already discussed the relationship training suppliers have with employers. In this section we consider the transition from education to the Modern Apprenticeship programmes.

The initiatives being evaluated have been introduced fairly recently, and the concept of 'Key Skills' is relatively new. In this respect, it is not surprising that we found little evidence of initiatives operating in schools complementing the Modern Apprenticeship programmes. In fact, most suppliers were not aware of school based Key Skills initiatives. A few of the suppliers we interviewed did have some candidates with GNVQs. One, for instance, was building on the Key Skills of a trainee, with a GNVQ with five Key Skills at Level 3. However, in general, it was rare even for trainees to have knowledge of, or certification in, Key Skills on entry to training.

We have noted above that among our respondents, the skills young people brought to a Modern Apprenticeship programme varied widely. We consider here some of the skills gaps identified and suppliers' views on the extent to which school prepares young people for work.

Some suppliers felt that there was a shortfall of young entrants' personal skills: in particular, working with others, improving own learning and performance, and communication skills. It was thought that young people had not had the opportunities to develop these in education. One supplier was concerned that pupils were 'spoon fed' at school and did not really understand about self learning. Suppliers considered that young people had not had the opportunities to develop initiative and did not have enquiring minds. One of the trainees said he had had personal development lessons at school and there had been some group working, but that these lessons were taken less seriously than academic subject lessons. Suppliers were less critical of the IT skills young people brought to their training, although one of the trainees noted that, at school, she had barely touched a computer.

Lack of exposure to the world of work was seen as another issue. Some suppliers noted that young people enter the workforce with an unrealistic view and attitude:

> *'School does not prepare you. Life preparation is vital. It gives you a head start on knowing what the expectation is of you as an employee.'*
>
> *'Young people really need to have a realistic expectation and an understanding of what's involved and there seems to be little input from schools or parents. . . . Young people's understanding of the skills needed is dropping.'*

This was confirmed by some of the trainees, one of whom commented that at school her attitude was against authority. Work experience placements were welcomed, but suppliers felt that these could be longer and more structured. It was also thought that schools have an insufficient understanding of the world of work, and that there is a lack of careers advice and support:

> *'There is no system at present to cope with young people who are undecided about what to do — these are the ones who may get pressed into Modern Apprenticeships and then drop out.'*

It was reported that these issues could present real problems when trying to develop apprentices.

6.7 Impact of Key Skills delivery in Modern Apprenticeships

In evaluating the impact of Key Skills delivery there are a number of issues to consider:

- **Before and after** — Ideally, to explore issues relating to the acquisition and impact of key skills, information needs to be collected before and after the implementation of certain events or initiatives. Given the time period for this research and the nature of the learning process, this has not been possible.
- **The existing abilities of young people** — The 'distance travelled' is sometimes referred to in relation to the impact of various initiatives, and this is particularly relevant to this research. The skills of new entrants to the Modern Apprenticeship programmes we surveyed varied widely. Because of this, certain groups of young people had more to gain from Key Skills development than others. The abilities of the new entrants ranged from those with the Key Skills already, to those with a lot of ground to make up, which the training supplier was not necessarily equipped to support. One supplier felt that it was the younger candidates who benefited the most from Key Skills, as the older candidates were more likely to: 'only need their Key Skills polishing.'
- **Key Skills development does not happen in a vacuum** — A common response was that the impact and benefits seen in trainees came from the whole process of undertaking a Modern Apprenticeship. As one supplier put it:

> *'They spend three years with a training supplier gaining qualifications, maturing, gaining confidence and expertise. Before they would not say "boo" to a goose.'*

But this was not just from doing the Key Skills. This was especially the case where Key Skills were heavily embedded and integrated into the NVQ. There was one example of an individual who had previously been quite disaffected but had become more motivated and settled down in his Modern Apprenticeship. It was thought, however, that this was not necessarily due to the Key Skills, but the whole approach of the training.

- **The benefits may not be apparent in the short term** — One of our respondents, in particular, noted that Key Skills did change attitudes but that it was very difficult to see the instant benefits of Key Skill development in young people. As this respondent explained:

> *'You need to look at the longer term to see the benefits. It's like asking "are you a good teacher?" It's generally something you wouldn't know in the short term.'*

Furthermore, because Key Skills was a new initiative, many respondents felt that it was still too early to evaluate the impact.

These points notwithstanding, respondents were able to give some insights into the impact of Key Skills. These are summarised below:

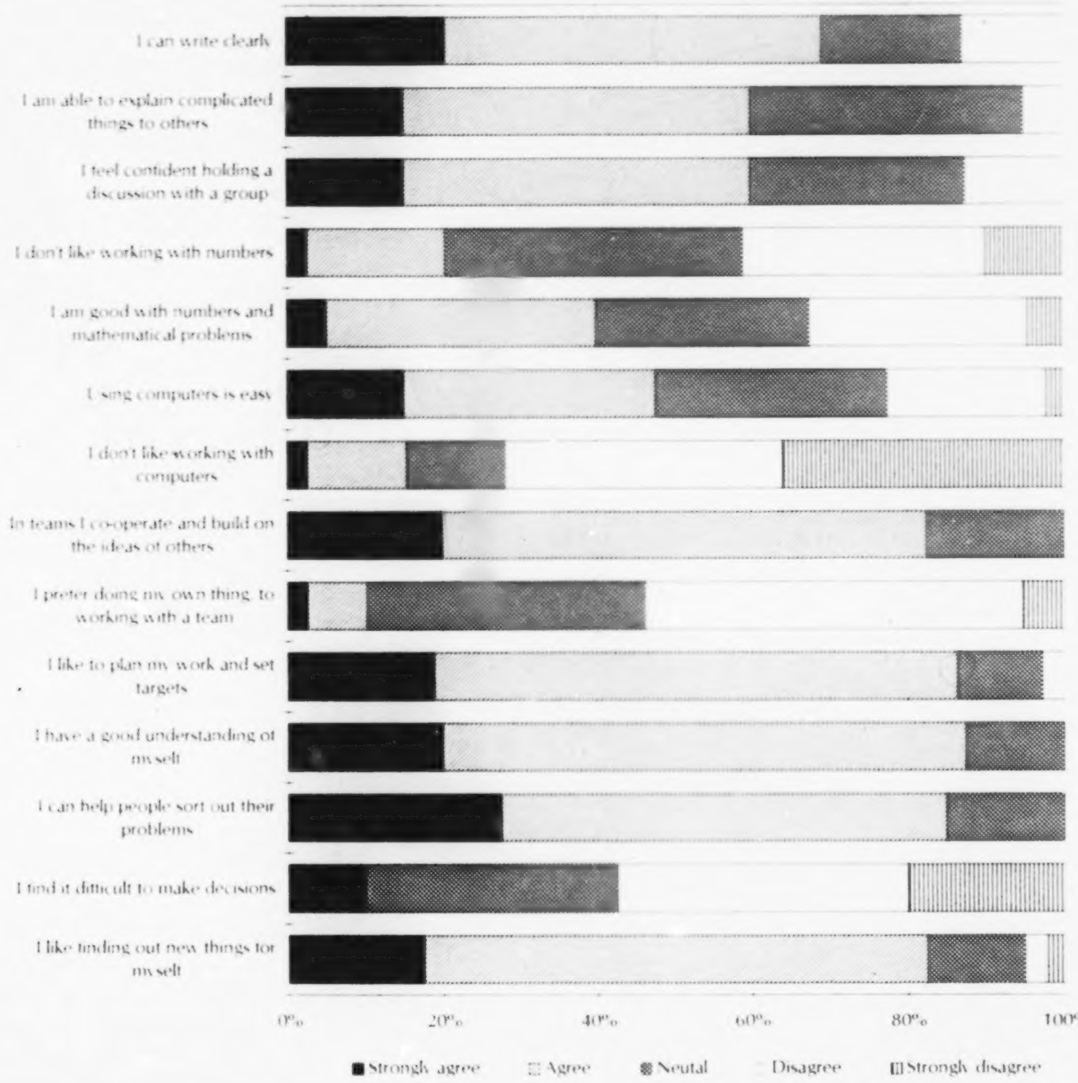
- Increased **confidence and motivation** was seen as the main impact of the Key Skills. One example of this was a trainee in health and social care who chaired a meeting for her communication Key Skill. She felt that this had helped her both with her presentation skills and her self confidence. It was noted that Key Skills can help young people to become more motivated, enhance their self worth and change attitudes, by making them realise what they can do.
- **Raising young people's awareness** of the Key Skills they have was seen as an important benefit. Suppliers thought that as well as increasing confidence, this could help with writing CVs and application forms. It also enabled young people to focus upon what they could do. It gave young people the self knowledge which could help them improve themselves. It was pointed out that Key Skills development could also raise the employer's awareness of the young person's abilities. This could help the individual progress within an organisation. We have noted that, in some cases, Key Skills were heavily embedded into the NVQ to such an extent that the young person is unaware of them. This may mean that this potential impact is not realised.
- **Personal effectiveness.** One supplier noted that Key Skills development forced young people to do their jobs properly and to understand how business works. A trainee who had completed her training perceived that the Key Skills process had helped her to increase her efficiency and made her look at her job in a better way. Some of the Key Skills assignments had given her the impetus to do things she would not normally do. For example, using a computer package for monitoring some aspect of her work, which she would normally have done manually.

6.7.1 The questionnaire survey

Data from the questionnaire survey of trainees provide some further insights into the impact of Key Skills training. The survey attempted to determine trainees' confidence in each of the Key Skill areas. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of attitude statements relating to the skills.

We show in Figure 6:1 the trainees' responses to these statements. Comparing these responses to those of students, we can see that a higher proportion of trainees than students agreed with the following statements:

Figure 6:1 Trainees' confidence in Key Skills



Source: IES Trainee Survey, 1998

Table 6:2 Trainees' confidence in Key Skills (mean scores)

Key Skills	All	Gender		Time on training		Age	
		Female	Male	Less than one year	More than one year	16 to 19	Over 20
Written communication skills	3.8	3.9	3.7	3.6	4.0	3.7	3.9
Oral communication skills	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.7
Application of number	3.2	2.9	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.0	3.2
Information technology	3.6	3.8	3.6	3.5	3.8	3.6	3.7
Working with others	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.9
Improving own learning and performance	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.9	4.1	4.0	4.0
Problem solving	3.9	3.7	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.8	4.0
N = whole trainee sample	*40*	*15*	*24*	*22*	*16*	*23*	*17*

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Source: IES Trainee Survey

- 'In teams, I co-operate and build on the ideas of others'
- 'I like to plan my work and set targets'
- 'I can help people sort out their problems', and
- 'I like finding out new things for myself'.

These statements relate to the Key Skills of working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving. From the responses to these statements, we have calculated some indicators of trainees' confidence in each of the Key Skills. The mean score for each Key Skill is shown in Table 6:2. The nearer the mean score is to five, the higher is the confidence of the trainees in this area. Again, on comparing these data with the students' scores we have found that trainees were more confident in the latter three Key Skills: working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving. This may suggest that these are skills which young people feel more confident in once they have started work or training, or as they get older.

In Table 6:2, we analyse our sample by the time trainees have spent in training. This shows that on average, those who had been on the training programme for more than one year were more confident about their written communication, oral communication, IT and improving own learning and performance Key Skills. We also show that those in the older age group were generally more confident about their Key Skills. Male trainees were more confident about application of number and problem solving. This is probably a reflection of the occupation distribution, with a higher proportion of males in engineering or technical occupations.

6.8 What more could be done to support Key Skills development?

Suppliers were asked what more they considered could be done to support the delivery of Key Skills in training programmes. We conclude this chapter with an outline of their responses:

- Support and training for tutors and trainers of Key Skills in the Key Skills themselves and in how to deliver them was viewed as an ongoing requirement. Some suppliers were quite critical of the support provided by WESTEC. For example, one respondent noted:

> *'If I was to ring up for advice on how to work with a candidate on a particular Key Skill, I feel WESTEC would not necessarily know or know who to refer us to for advice.'*

However, we have been informed that the situation has changed since the time when the research was carried out. It was commonly thought that the support provided by WESTEC came too late. A typical response was: 'we've been struggling with Key Skills over the past 12 months but we've cracked it now'. However, the areas where more support would be welcomed included developing recruitment procedures and systems, processes and materials for introducing Key Skills to young people, and support and material on best practice in Key Skills delivery:

- raising awareness of employers of the importance of Key Skills to try to encourage greater support from employers, was seen as important; as well as
- educating young people of the long term benefits of Key Skills, and
- more time and resources to better enable suppliers to bring young recruits up to the levels required of them within the Key Skills elements.
- some suggested building Key Skills into NVQs, others felt this was done effectively by the assessors
- finally, longer lead in times for new initiatives was recommended. This point related to the introduction of further initiatives, such as the delivery of Key Skills for National Traineeships.

7. Employers' Perceptions of Key Skills

7.1 Introduction

The specific objectives of this study in relation to employers were to examine:

- how employers are developing the Key Skills of young people
- what are the barriers and problems which employers encounter in developing the Key Skills
- how schemes operated by schools, colleges, training suppliers and employers complement each other
- how transitions might be improved
- how employers record and assess Key Skills, and
- the impact of Key Skills development and the benefits of Key Skills training.

The aim was that interviews should be conducted with 25 employers, most of which would be involved in Modern Apprenticeships, and all of which would employ young people. Difficulties were experienced with the sample supplied with the TEC, in particular relating to inaccurate contact details. This meant that 22 interviews were in fact achieved. The research method used was semi-structured interviews, some face-to-face and some on the telephone. Within these organisations we spoke to managers with responsibility for training.

To provide context to some of the research objectives, we begin this chapter with a discussion of employers' level of demand for Key Skills and the importance they place on these skills. This discussion draws from both our research findings from this study as well as previous research in this area. We continue by considering the Key Skills young people bring with them into the labour market and the extent to which employers are satisfied with young people's Key Skills. This leads us on to a discussion of the transitions from education into employment. In the following chapter, we cover the remaining research objectives: employers' delivery of Key Skills and the impact of Key Skills development.

7.2 The nature of the employers surveyed

The sample of 22 employer representatives surveyed included a wide range of organisations in terms of size, industrial sector and the types of occupations in which they employed or trained young people. All of the organisations employed young people aged under 25.

- **Size**: more than half of the respondents employed less than 50 employees at the site surveyed. Many of these were very small businesses, with less than 25 employees. At the other end of the size spectrum, almost one-third were large organisations, with more than 200 employees.
- **Sector:** a wide range of industrial sectors were included in the sample, with approximately one-quarter of the employers in manufacturing. Those within the service sector encompassed retailing, hotel and catering, communications, business services, public administration, and health and other services.
- **Occupations** in which young people were employed: again, there was a wide range comprising: accountancy, administration, care, catering, engineering, hairdressing, retailing and travel services.
- **Attitude towards training:** three-quarters of the sample employed Modern Apprenticeship trainees. Most of these were involved in the training of the young people and some were aware of the Key Skills. However, a few could be described as taking a more hands-off approach, *ie* they left the training of the apprentice to a training supplier, and did not have much knowledge of Key Skills or what was covered in the training. The employers without Modern Apprentices were generally aware of the Key Skills, and many had employees working towards NVQs. As we noted in the report of the training supplier survey, a common complaint from the training suppliers was that some employers were not supportive of Key Skills training and development. Similarly, the IES national survey of employers' perceptions of Key Skills found that knowledge about the Key Skills was generally limited (Dench *et al.*, 1998). Also, many of the employers we surveyed were not aware of the Key Skills as a formal group of skills or an initiative. However, those who took an active role in the training of the Modern Apprentice, or had direct contracts with the TEC to deliver the Modern Apprenticeship training, were aware of the Key Skills.

7.3 Employers' demand for Key Skills

Various national studies have drawn attention to the widespread demand among employers for communication and personal skills, and literacy and numeracy. The increase in demand for communication and interpersonal skills is linked with the growth of the service sector and the importance of customer care and sales. In this study, we asked respondents about how important each Key Skill was for the jobs to which they most regularly recruited a Modern Apprentice or young person. Although employers we surveyed had not always come across the term 'Key Skills', when questioned about each skill area, the importance of these skills was clearly recognised.

Overall, communication skills were seen as the most important, followed by working with others and improving own learning and performance. When considering the importance of the Key Skill, most employers were thinking about the skill requirements of the job in which the young people were currently employed, rather than positions these individuals may progress to after their apprenticeship.

Reflecting the IES national study of employers' perceptions of Key Skills, problem solving, IT, and application of number were considered less important in certain occupations than others. We consider employers' demand for each of the Key Skills in turn below, and analyse our findings by occupation.

7.3.1 Communication skills

Communication skills were considered very important for all occupations but especially so for administration, care, catering, hairdressing and retail. The IES national survey of employers (Dench *et al.*, 1998) also found communication skills to be particularly important for roles where employees were dealing directly with the public, internal and external customers, and not working in isolation.

Our respondents reported that there was less of a requirement for communication skills in occupations such as an electronics technician or TV repair, where the individual was largely working alone. However, the national study reported that communication was becoming increasingly important in all sectors, as a result of more emphasis being placed upon providing a service (Dench *et al.*, 1998). Within manufacturing, for instance, it was reported that communication skills were key for giving and receiving instructions, and working in a team effectively. It was also found that those with communication skills were the most likely to progress, and that a broader range and depth of ability in communicating was required in supervisory and managerial roles, *ie* those roles which young people on Modern Apprenticeships may progress to. We now consider the occupations included in our survey.

- Administration: all types of communication were considered important, including speaking on the telephone, written correspondence and face-to-face communication. For example, a receptionist is the first line of contact with clients, and therefore needs to communicate effectively in order to take messages and run a switchboard. One respondent noted that communication skills underpinned everything else, and those young people who could communicate were the most successful.

- Care: both written and oral communications were seen as very important. As one respondent reported, referring to a trainee in childcare:

  > *'It is very important because she has to deal with staff, parents and children. . . . A nursery assistant is teaching so needs to communicate very well.'*

Another respondent in a residential home for the elderly reported that communication skills were necessary to interpret orders and requests, relate any deterioration in health to other members of staff, and communicate with residents.

- In catering, our respondents felt that if you could not communicate with people around you, you could not get the job done. Communication skills were also required for participating in meetings.
- In hairdressing, there was reported to be a greater requirement for oral communication skills than written. Nevertheless, written communication skills were thought to be needed for those who progress into training or managerial roles.
- To be a travel consultant, one employer reported:

  > *'You have to be like a sponge: you have to absorb and take in as much as possible and be responsible for taking that information on board . . . communication and personality are very important in the industry as they can make or break a sale.'*

- In retailing, communication is important for selling to customers.
- In engineering, respondents felt that trainees needed communication skills to be able to develop good relationships with customers, deal with telephone enquiries, understand and produce written work to learn about the job, and pass instructions to and train others.
- In a role such as a postal worker, the level of communication skill required was considered to be at a lower level, *ie* basic literacy and politeness.

7.3.2 Application of number

Previous studies have found that application of number is of lesser importance than many of the other Key Skills (IES, 1997; Dench *et al.* 1998; ATC and City of Bristol College, 1997) especially in lower skilled and less senior jobs. In many occupations and more junior positions, the IES national survey of employers found that the majority of respondents wanted employees with only basic level number skills, *ie* have the ability to follow a simple set of procedures accurately (Dench *et al.*, 1998). For example in care, basic counting and arithmetic was all that was required. Application of number, however, does become more important as individuals progress through organisations. Managers and supervisors in all occupations are frequently involved in using, manipulating and presenting numerical data, as well as reviewing and revising the ways in which the data is used and collected within their organisation.

Of all the Key Skills, numerical skills are seen as being the most occupationally specific, being important in some jobs but not as important in others. For example, in the IES national survey of employers' perceptions of Key Skills, several employers in manufacturing reported that engineers would be expected to have a high level of numerical skill, and collect, record and present data as a matter of course. As one respondent noted: 'engineering is numbers'. Application of number skills are also key for accountancy roles. Within clerical and secretarial occupations, employees are also expected to have numerical skills beyond a basic level. In retailing, application of number is growing in importance, with some sales assistants, for example, being given responsibility for balancing the till at the end of each day. The IES report noted that the introduction of information technology can both reduce and increase the need for number skills, *ie* by increasing the amount and range of data available, but routinising some tasks (Dench *et al.*, 1998).

Our findings from employers in the WESTEC area generally reflected the national studies. Although still considered 'fairly important', application of number was viewed as the least important of the five Key Skills by the majority of respondents. However, respondents in engineering, retailing and the travel industry ranked this Key Skill very highly. We summarise responses by occupational area below.

- Engineering employers regarded number skills as especially important. It was reported that trainees were using numbers all the time, in particular when testing, checking and measuring equipment. One employer noted that their skill requirements in this Key Skill area were far beyond those required for the Modern Apprenticeship in engineering manufacture.
- For a travel consultant, one respondent emphasised the importance of application of number skills:

  > *'If you are adding or going through costings you have got to get it right. If you are wrong or misquote, the company is liable and has to make up the difference.'*

- In catering, application of number was considered important both for those training to become a chef, in order to understand and work out the prices of menus and the cost of producing a meal, as well as those working in the restaurant.
- For administration, one employer felt the application of number Key Skill was fairly important, but the least important of the five Key Skills. Their employees needed to be able to

manipulate figures. Another considered that administrative roles did not require much calculation; it was only for calculating petty cash that number skills were needed.

- In care, application of number was generally regarded as having low importance. Respondents noted that trainees in care occupations rarely used numbers in their work.
- Similarly in hairdressing, respondents felt that trainees did not use application of number skills very much. Our respondents thought that they only needed to understand percentages and ratios.
- In retail, we came across two contrasting views. One respondent told us:

> '*They* (trainees) *don't need to be a brain surgeon, we try to make it as easy as we can.*'

Another was of the opinion that young trainees needed number skills in order to be able to work out deals and offers. These young people, who were selling caravans, clearly had more autonomy in their work.

7.3.3 IT skills

Previous studies have found that IT skills are less widely needed than some of the other Key Skills (IES, 1997; Dench *et al.*, 1998; ATC and City of Bristol College, 1997). It has been reported that employers want their employees to be able to operate IT packages and system, but they do not necessarily require a detailed understanding of how computers work. Instead, they want a familiarity with computers and a willingness to work with them (Dench *et al.*, 1998). Tasks using IT may simply involve using a set of procedures developed by an IT department. There is not a requirement for a detailed understanding of the system employees work with. This may even be the case at managerial level, but managers do generally need a sound understanding of the potential that IT offers.

The level and extent of IT skills required is dependent on how computerised the organisation is. For example, some organisations still operate with just a few desktop computers. In these cases IT may only be used for word-processing or by the accounts department (Dench *et al.*, 1998).

The IES national survey of employers' perceptions of Key Skills found that care organisations in particular had a very low level of usage of computers. Managers in care, however, may use IT as an information tool, for time sheets or for planning work rotas. The national study found that in clerical and secretarial occupations there was a greater need for IT, but the level of skill required was quite low. Again, at managerial level, the breadth and level of skill required is much higher. The report noted that although the level of IT skills required by many organisations was currently at a fairly basic level, this would not necessarily be the case in future. The extent to which employees will need to develop sophisticated IT skills for future roles is unclear (Dench *et al.*, 1998).

Our findings from the survey of employers for WESTEC clearly illustrate the point that the more computerised an organisation is, the greater is the demand for IT skills. Again, we analyse the results by occupational area.

- In administration, IT skills were considered to be very important by our respondents. One employer considered that they were highly computerised and trainees used word processing and database packages, and the Internet, regularly.
- For travel consultants, IT was considered to be important, as a lot of information was accessed on computer. One respondent noted that it saved money if employees used systems effectively.
- Respondents employing engineering apprentices reported that IT was only used to a limited degree, although one of the companies required trainees to use computer assisted design packages.
- In catering, it was noted that IT skills were not at all important now, but will become increasingly so in the future, with, for example, the introduction of computerised stock control.
- Hairdressing employers saw the importance of IT skills for apprentices when the salon was computerised, but otherwise not. However, one salon which was computerised only required that their staff were able to turn a computer on and access certain information: 'by pressing the right buttons'.
- Our retailing employers reported that computers were becoming more important.
- In care, computers were not used at all by care assistants.

7.3.4 Working with others

Working with others and teamworking skills have been found to be very important by an IES national survey of employers, as well as numerous other studies of employers' skill needs across all occupations (IES, 1997; ATC and City of Bristol College, 1997). Work is frequently organised around some form of team input, and employers are expecting employees to take more responsibility in their jobs. The downsizing of organisations has meant that employees need to work more efficiently together. Teamworking is also becoming increasingly important, and again this cuts across all occupational groups (Dench *et al.*, 1998; ATC and City of Bristol College, 1997). Teamworking skills are particularly important where teams are self managed (Giles *et al.*, 1997).

There are clear trends towards a requirement for individuals to help each other, be more flexible and help others out during peaks of workload (Dench *et al.*, 1998). The IES national survey of employers' perceptions of Key Skills reported that in sales and retail roles, it is important for staff to present a united front to the customer and be seen to get on well with each other, as well as work effectively as a team. Employees in all occupations are increasingly required to make links across organisations, understand different roles, and how they fit into the overall plan (Dench *et al.*, 1998). This study reported that the responsibility of planning team activities generally lay with managerial or supervisory staff. Managers and supervisors are required to motivate, co-ordinate and direct more junior staff, and thus require a wider range and breadth of skills in this Key Skill area.

Responses from WESTEC employers were as follows:

- In administration, one large employer emphasised the importance of young trainees to be able to work in teams. Teamworking skills were especially important in project based work, where the makeup of teams changed for different projects. A small employer noted that the ability to work with others was important because of the close contact employees had with clients.
- Skills related to working with others were also considered very important for care roles. Respondents in this sector reported that everyone had to work together to give a good standard of care. For example:

  > *'It makes for a happy nursery if the staff get on well; it makes the children happy.'*

- In catering, the working with others Key Skills was considered the most important of the six.
- The engineering employers noted that they were very team oriented and, as such, skills in this area were critical.
- In hairdressing, we were told that stylists have got to work well in a team 'otherwise the system would collapse'.

7.3.5 Improving own learning

The IES national study of employers' perceptions of Key Skills found that those employees who wanted to progress would need to take responsibility for their own work and career (Dench *et al.*, 1998). The improving own learning Key Skill was considered of most importance for managers and where multiskilling had been introduced. Employers included in the WESTEC survey also considered this Key Skill to be one of the most important of the six.

- In administration, one company noted that it was important for trainees to have the improving own learning Key Skill, if they were working towards an NVQ.

- In care, respondents noted that they required young trainees to show initiative and be self directed in their own learning. One employer offered extensive training opportunities and the individual needed to be motivated to learn in order to benefit fully from this. It was also considered important for the individual's own self to achieve things.
- In catering, this Key Skill again seemed to be important for Modern Apprentices and employees who wanted to progress and develop their own skills. It was also noted that the industry was subject to a fair amount of change, for example in food regulations, and employees needed to be able to take these changes on board.
- One respondent in the engineering sector reported that:

  > *'Employees need to improve and better themselves in the workplace for their own future.'*

- A response from a travel company was

  > *'If you want to get on and be recognised in the branch and the company, you need to take responsibility for yourself.'*

- Hairdressing employers also required that trainees and all staff be self motivated.

7.3.6 Problem solving

Previous research has reported that it is only in higher level professional and technical occupations that high level problem solving skills are required, *ie* the ability to deal with complex problems (Dench *et al.*, 1998). In the majority of occupations, employees need to be able to select standard procedures to fully-described problems, and clarify and deal with routine problems using established procedures. Thus, there are clearly limits to the type and complexity of problems employees are expected to deal with. For example, it has been found in care that junior carers are only allowed to deal with simple problems for which there are set procedures. A supervisor will be called in to deal with anything more complex or serious (Dench *et al.*, 1998). Problem solving skills are, however, becoming more important than they were in the past. This is as a result of changes in the workplace, such as downsizing, devolved responsibilities and teamworking.

The employers in the WESTEC survey generally considered problem solving to be less important than some of the other Key Skills — in particular working with others and communication — but there was some variation by occupational area.

- For administrative roles in a small company, problem solving skills were considered to be the most important Key Skill, together with communication. However, another employer did not consider problem solving skills to be important, as clerical staff, in particular, got help in this area:

> *'She does not have the independence or the responsibility to see things from the beginning to end on her own.'*

- In childcare, problem solving was seen as less important than some of the other Key Skills, as assistants did not have to deal with administrative problems. However, they did need to sort out the children's problems. Another respondent noted that care assistants would come across and would need to be able to deal with situations which were out of the ordinary:

> *'It is better for the resident if a care assistant can sort out their problems immediately with little fuss, rather than involving others and taking time.'*

- Catering employers told us that problem solving was a team effort and not all individuals within the team would be required to do this.
- For engineering, trainees' problem solving was thought to be very important. Employees had to use expensive equipment and needed to make sure things were running all right. As such, problem solving was something engineers were expected to do every day.
- Respondents in the hairdressing and travel sectors did not consider this Key Skill to be a requirement for trainees as: 'there was always someone there to help'.

7.3.7 Key Skills versus other skills

The national study of employers' perceptions of Key Skills found that employers in a surprising range of sectors could train occupational skills if an individual had the Key Skills (Dench *et al.*, 1998). The Key Skills were seen as indicators of an ability to learn, take on the necessary ways of working and develop occupational skills. In some occupations it was reported that the Key Skills were indistinguishable from occupational skills, and that the personal and interpersonal Key Skill underpinned the occupation specific skills.

A recent study of employers in the former County of Avon, listed initiative, a positive attitude to work, a friendly and outgoing nature, confidence, accuracy, pride in one's own work, and reliability, as some of the other attributes necessary for effective employees (ATC and City of Bristol College, 1997). We list below the other skills and attributes mentioned by our employers.

- In administration, personality and honesty, business awareness, willingness to have a go at anything, and an amenable attitude, were the other attributes considered important.
- In care, staff must have common sense, which was seen as an innate skill, as well as patience and understanding. In childcare, it was considered important that staff liked children. Being non-judgmental and treating all equally were other requirements mentioned.

- In catering occupations, cleanliness, health, safety and hygiene were key. Organisation of one's work was also considered to be very important, *ie* washing up after yourself, and keeping work areas clean and safe.
- Reflecting the national study findings, employers reported that engineers also needed occupational specific skills, as well as the Key Skills. The Key Skills alone were not considered sufficient. These occupation specific skill included motor skills, *ie* hand and brain co-ordination skills, technology skills and knowledge. As one respondent put it: 'if they come with no technical skills, then we're struggling,' *ie* this was considered the most important skill area. Punctuality and reliability were also noted.
- In hairdressing, respondents felt that the Key Skills covered all the skill requirements for the job, except for physical aptitude, artistic flair, and the ability to come up with new ideas.
- For a travel consultant, it was thought that the Key Skills covered all the skill requirements for the job, and that communication was the most important.
- Similarly in retailing, Key Skills were thought to cover most of the employers' skill requirements, but personality was also thought to be important.

We may conclude that with regard to employers' Key Skills requirements there is a specificity of need, *ie* the requirement varies according to the context and the occupation. Job applicants need to show they can apply the Key Skills in a way which is relevant to the job. In some occupations where employees exercise little autonomy, there is a lower level skill requirement in these Key Skill areas. However, higher up the occupational hierarchy, or in supervisory or managerial roles, a wider range and breadth of skills in these areas are required. In the following section, we consider the supply of Key Skills and the extent to which employers are satisfied with the Key Skills of young people.

7.4 Employers' satisfaction with the Key Skills of young applicants

Recruiters often criticise the abilities of young people, especially new entrants to the labour market. Nationally, employers' concerns about the skills of young people in the labour market have been well documented. For example, it has been reported that over 30 per cent of employers with young workers have identified a gap between the skills of young employees and those needed to meet current business objectives (IES, 1997). Other research has noted that employers are most dissatisfied with writing skills, and understanding of the world of work (Prism Research Ltd, 1997). Different studies use different methodologies, samples and questions. When employers have been asked about the skills of potential recruits in the labour market, as opposed to their existing employees, the level of dissatisfaction is much greater.

The WESTEC 1997 *Employer Survey* (Prism Research Ltd, 1997) found that employers were most dissatisfied with the English and communication skills of young people in the labour market. There were higher levels of satisfaction with the working with others, and improving own learning, Key Skills. In our study we asked about the level of skills of potential young recruits. Our respondents were most satisfied with the IT skills of young people, reflecting national research among employers (IES, 1997).

The level of employers' satisfaction with the Key Skills in our WESTEC survey falls broadly into three distinct categories. This level of satisfaction appears to vary according to occupational area and to be influenced by the nature of the labour market the employer is operating within.

- The first group of respondents are those who were largely dissatisfied with the Key Skills of young people in the labour market. In care for example, it was reported to us that the general standard of applicants was quite poor. Similarly in catering, one employer noted that those young people applying for jobs have extremely poor Key Skills, but this was not the case for another employer in the sector. The level of satisfaction seems to be influenced by the attractiveness of the employer and the job, and the recruitment difficulties experienced. For example, in an unskilled and low waged occupation, employers reported problems with basic skills, *ie* basic literacy and numeracy.
- Our second and smaller group of employers are those who noted that Key Skills among young people were very good. These respondents included a catering employer who thought that because catering is such hard work, only those who were serious and appreciated this actually applied. Other occupations where satisfaction with Key Skills was high were stage managers and accountants. This group of employers all offered attractive training opportunities for their employees. These were also the ones who were more likely to be involved in training and were aware of the Key Skills. We may conclude that these employers offered the most attractive conditions of employment and working environment, and were more likely to attract the most skilled applicants.
- Other employers reported that the Key Skills of young applicants were more variable. Some found that some applicants were better than others. For example, one employer noted that those young people with outside interests had better communication skills than those without, who:

  > *'. . . just sit there and don't ask any questions.'*

Another noted that:

> *'You get all sorts; some are good and some are bad.'*

Others found that there was variation between the Key Skills of young people, with some of the Key Skills of an individual being stronger than others. We now consider employers' perceptions of young people's ability in each of the Key Skills areas in turn.

7.4.1 Communication skills

The 1997 WESTEC *Employer Survey* found that written communication skills were a particular problem among young people. Basic literacy and spelling were criticised (Prism Research Ltd, 1997). The IES national study of employers' perceptions of Key Skills found that among young people, the proportion of poorly written and constructed applications were high (Dench *et al.*, 1998). Applicants not reading and understanding instructions was a particular criticism. One employer in this survey found that young people were unable to give an opinion or put a point across, were vague, and unable to enter conversations. However, it was concluded that this, to some extent, may reflect levels of maturity.

In our study, communication was also found to be the main problem area. Typical comments were:

> *'Not one trainee could be left to pass on information to another — they just don't know how to do it.'*
>
> *'They couldn't have a conversation with someone in a work context. . . . Spelling is also a problem.'*

7.4.2 Application of number

There was more variation in employers' opinions about young people's numeracy skills. We have already noted that for many occupational areas, the level demanded of the application of number Key Skill was relatively low. These employers were more likely to be satisfied with the skills young people offered. However, where there was a greater demand for this Key Skill, respondents were more critical of the supply. These respondents felt that young people were unable to do mental arithmetic without a calculator. In the national study, employers reported that they had more difficulty finding people with the appropriate level of number skills than for many of the other Key Skills (Dench *et al.*, 1998). Again, it was found that young people were able to plug numbers into a calculator but did not necessarily understand what they were doing. Typical responses were that young people were unable to understand basic processes of manipulating numbers such as calculating percentages. This lack of skill can have serious implications for businesses if, for example, errors or anomalies are not spotted at an early stage.

7.4.3 IT

We have noted above that national studies have reported more satisfaction with the IT skills of young people than any of the other Key Skills (IES, 1997). In the national survey, the general consensus was that most young people entering the labour market had good IT skills and at least met the needs of most employers (Dench *et al.*, 1998). In particular, it was noted that young people were not frightened of IT, understood some of the potential it offered, and had a general mindset which was relevant to the acquisition of IT skills. In general, young people were viewed as being better at this than older people.

Employers in our WESTEC survey were also, in general, more satisfied with young people's IT skills than the other Key Skills. Employers felt that young people seemed to have worked on IT at school:

> *'IT skills are good nowadays. Students seem to be doing IT at school and lots of youngsters are fairly up on IT.'*

However, it should be noted that in some cases this higher level of satisfaction of IT skills may simply reflect the employer's own low level of IT literacy and a lower level of expectation.

7.4.4 Working with others

The national survey of Key Skills and the WESTEC 1997 *Employer Survey* have both found that there was less dissatisfaction with the working with others Key Skills among employees, than most of the other Key Skills (Dench *et al.*, 1998; Prism Research Ltd, 1997). However, in our study, many employers were critical of young people's working with others and teamworking skills. As one employer put it, young people need:

> *'. . . to have a better idea of team working, they need to understand how a role fits into an organisation and how what they do or don't do affects others.'*

In contrast, other employers said that to some extent they would not expect young people to have highly developed skills in this area, and it was something they gained once they have started work. Some felt young people had developed some of their working with others skills through their school work experience placements.

7.4.5 Improving own learning and performance

In the national survey, employers' satisfaction was relatively high with the improving own learning Key Skill (Dench *et al.*, 1998). There was some criticism of instrumental attitudes to work and a lack of ambition, although this rarely presented major difficulties for employers. However, in our WESTEC study, respondents commented that many young people lacked motivation, were short-sighted, driven by wages, and lived for now rather than looking to the future. It was noted, though, that those individuals who had started working towards NVQs were more motivated and better able to manage their own learning.

7.4.6 Problem solving

The national survey of employers' perceptions of Key Skills noted that problem solving skills came with experience and that young people had not always had the opportunity to build up the necessary knowledge and experience to exhibit these skills (Dench *et al.*, 1998). This point was very much reflected in our WESTEC survey. In general, problem solving was seen as the weakest of the Key Skills of young people, but on the whole this was not an issue for employers as expectations were low, as illustrated by the following quote:

> *'They are coming into the company to be trained and I would be very surprised if they were good at it* (problem solving). *They obviously gain it whilst in work.'*

7.4.7 Other skills gaps

Other skills gaps identified in our survey by some respondents generally related to attitude. These included a poor attitude to work, a lack of commitment, and a lack of interest in working towards NVQs. For a small number of employers a deficiency of basic skills was presenting a problem.

We have detailed above employers' perceptions about the Key Skills of young applicants. In many cases there were clearly skills gaps. However, as in previous WESTEC employer surveys (Prism Research Ltd, 1997) significant proportions of employers were satisfied with the Key Skills of young people and this point should not be lost.

7.5 Transition from education into employment

Following on from our discussion of employers' satisfaction with the Key Skills of young applicants we now turn to consider the transition from education into employment. We discuss the extent to which employers can build on the Key Skills that young people have developed while in education, and their perceptions of how well education develops the Key Skills.

7.5.1 Extent to which employers can build on young people's existing Key Skills

A finding from a previous survey of employers in the former Avon area, was that organisations are having to invest time and money on 'employability' skills training, which they feel could be developed at an earlier age (ATC and City of Bristol College, 1997). In this study, we asked employers about the extent to which they were able to build upon any training in Key Skills young people may have received in school or college, before entering employment. An important point to note here was that in answering this question, employers were often referring to basic skills rather than Key Skills, and had difficulty distinguishing between the two. We came across a range of responses. Generally, where young people's Key Skills were thought to be lacking, employers felt least able to build on existing Key Skills.

A number of employers noted that they had to start from scratch in building up Key Skills. One employer noted that trainees were trained the company way and as such, they started from the beginning with all employees. Another, who was very critical of young people's Key Skills, reported that: 'they were banging their heads against a brick wall' when trying to build on young people's existing Key Skills. A fairly typical response, however, was that employers were able to build upon some of the Key Skills young entrants to the labour market bring with them, such as IT and numeracy, but this was more difficult with other Key Skills. Employers noted that skills in the areas of communication and working with others were the ones which most needed development.

Employers who were able to be the most selective in their recruitment were more likely to be able to develop and build on young people's existing Key Skills. For example, one of the engineering employers noted that they tended to recruit young people with Key Skills already beyond the level required for the Modern Apprenticeship. Working from this base, they were able to build on existing Key Skills by giving trainees the right type of activity in the company. Another example of this was an accountancy firm which was also able to recruit employees with a high Key Skills base, and therefore all it needed to do was brush up the existing Key Skills.

7.5.2 Employers' perceptions of how well education develops the Key Skills

In terms of employers' perceptions of how well education develops the Key Skills, a number of key points were made by our respondents.

- Of all the Key Skills, IT was the one which employers felt young people developed most in school.
- Employers were of the opinion that young people entering employment from colleges were more likely to have had previous Key Skills training.
- It was thought that some young people had been able to develop their Key Skills on work experience placements.

- Key Skills were seen as not being high profile enough in schools. As one respondent commented, young people did not enter employment with an awareness of how the Key Skills will benefit them.
- Employers reported that there was a lack of continuity between the development of the Key Skills in school and the application of these in work. As one employer noted: 'it is a stop start process'.
- Generally there was a perception that there was little Key Skills training going on in schools, and that schools were not doing enough to prepare young people for the real world. One employer was aware that schools were trying to develop the Key Skills but felt that this was still relatively new.

7.5.3 Employers' views on how transitions could be improved

Previous surveys of employers in the former Avon area have found that employers recommend that schools should place more emphasis upon work experience placements, teacher placements, and education business links. Employers also see GNVQ as a useful way of developing the Key Skills of young people (Prism Research Ltd, 1997). It has been reported that employers would like young people to develop their Key Skills at an earlier age (ATC and City of Bristol College, 1997). Similar suggestions for improving the transition from school to employment were made by the respondents to our survey. In particular, respondents recommended that schools should do more to make young people aware of the Key Skills and understand the importance of them.

7.5.4 Are the Key Skills of young people improving? — employers' views

The 1997 WESTEC *Employer Survey* (Prism Research Ltd, 1997) found that one in eight respondents felt that the Key Skills of young people had improved in the last 12 months. This was interpreted as indicating that moves to address this issue through education and training programmes are having an impact. Respondents to our study were also asked about their perceptions of the changes in the Key Skills of young people over the last three years. Again this was an attempt to gain some insight into the effect the schemes being operated in schools were having. We have noted above that employers' experiences in relation to the skills of young people vary quite widely, and this is reflected in the responses to this question.

The group of employers who were largely dissatisfied with the level of Key Skills held by young people, generally felt that young people's Key Skills had declined in recent years. Typical comments were that attitudes were changing, and that a greater proportion of young people found it difficult to understand and appreciate the seriousness of work. These respondents felt that schools were not doing enough to prepare people for the world of work, and as a result Key Skills were declining. Numeracy skills in particular were seen as having worsened. However, one employer noted that this was also in part due to their particular industry (catering) not doing enough to attract skilled applicants.

An encouraging number of employers were of the opinion that young people's Key Skills were improving. The introduction of NVQ and GNVQ was mentioned as contributing to this improvement as well as the mode of learning encouraged by GCSE coursework.

Employers noted that more and more young people were entering the labour market with an understanding of what an NVQ is and what working on modules is like. Typical comments were:

> *'They are more geared up for it than five years ago.'*
>
> *'They know more about them than they used to.'*

The overall view appeared to be that IT skills had improved but spelling and numeracy skills were in decline. However, it does appear that employers are beginning to see some evidence that young people are more aware of things like NVQs and Key Skills, and that they have had more experience in taking responsibility for their own learning.

8. Employers — Approaches to Developing Key Skills

This chapter of the report considers employers' approaches to developing the Key Skills of young people and those on Modern Apprenticeship programmes, in particular. We discuss the employer respondents' views of the most effective methods of developing or training Key Skills, as well as barriers and problems they have encountered. We look at how employers record and assess Key Skills on recruitment and during training, and conclude with a discussion of employers' views on the impact of Key Skills development and the benefits of Key Skills training.

8.1 Development of Key Skills

8.1.1 How do employers train or develop Key Skills?

Before outlining the approaches employers have taken to developing or training, a number of key points should be considered.

- Firstly, few of the employers we surveyed were involved in specific formal Key Skills training, but the majority were involved to some extent with general training of their young people, either formally or informally. However, a few of the employers questioned had a direct contract with the TEC to deliver Modern Apprenticeship programmes, and were thus more involved in Key Skills training. The WESTEC 1997 *Employer Survey* (Prism Research Ltd, 1997) also found that it was a minority of employers (34 per cent) that undertook specific training to develop Key Skills.
- Many respondents confused Key Skills training with training in general or training for other skills, *ie* training for NVQs, occupational training, and training in company practices. This meant that not all employers talked exclusively about Key Skills training, delivery and development.
- Employers used a range of approaches to training but the most common method was a combination of on-the-job or in-house training, with off-site, college based training.
- Of the training described, some was specifically tailored to developing Key Skills and this was in the main delivered by training suppliers or by employers where they had a direct contract with the TEC. Other training described, whilst not specifically focusing on Key Skills, could be argued to cover

many of the Key Skills areas. This other training was generally informal and delivered by employers. It was often described as on-the-job training to enable the trainee to carry out their job effectively. Examples of such training were:

  - in care: training covering how to meet basic client needs, and training in company methods and on company equipment
  - in administration: training in telephone techniques
  - in retail: sales training, and
  - in manufacturing work: training in how to operate the piece-work system.

- A final point to be made was that several of the larger employers approached had in-house training departments and had developed their own training programmes and materials. These facilities were used to deliver training in competencies which very closely matched Key Skills, although had not been formally identified as such.

There was a broad spectrum of methods of Key Skills training being implemented by employers. At one extreme end of this spectrum were employers where there was no real training in Key Skills. This was either because no Modern Apprentices were employed, or Key Skills training was entirely left to the training supplier to deliver. Several of the respondents took no part in the Modern Apprenticeship, NVQ or Key Skills training. These employers tended to have distant relationships with their training supplier. The training suppliers set tasks for the trainees to carry out at work, but the employers did not seem to know what the trainees did while at the training supplier, nor the approach to training of the supplier. The most extreme example of this was where even the on-the-job development was supervised by a tutor from the training supplier.

The majority of respondents fell towards the middle of this spectrum of approaches. In these cases, the employer had some involvement in the training of their young people. This involvement spanned informal and formal job related skills training, which often covered Key Skill areas, involvement with Key Skill training given by training suppliers, and delivery of discrete Key Skill elements. Employers in the middle of the scale described some of their approaches to involvement in Key Skills training. Some had established close links with training suppliers, and thus to some extent were having more of a say in the training supplied and were better able to build on the skills being developed off-the-job. Several were trying to create such links between the off-site training and their on-site development, 'attempting to build on knowledge and theory gained at college and apply it in a practical situation'.

Other approaches being taken were to develop the Key Skills on-the-job. One employer spoke of identifying activities in the workplace to help trainees develop both occupational and Key Skills. He referred to these activities as 'involvement' rather than training, and he felt they involved the trainee more fully in their work. Another employer spoke of spending time with trainees who were working towards Key Skills in order to emphasise the importance and relevance of Key Skills.

At the other end of the spectrum were a small number of respondents who delivered all elements of Key Skills training themselves. These were the employers who had direct contracts with the TEC to deliver the Modern Apprenticeship.

8.1.2 Employers' views on the most effective approaches to developing Key Skills

Many of the employers interviewed had very definite views on the best way to train and develop skills in young people. As noted earlier, however, the views tended not to focus specifically on training for Key Skills, and not all of those who commented were actually involved in Key Skills training themselves. The two most common suggestions were:

- Firstly, that there should be a mixture of formal off-the-job training, informal and formal in-house, or on-the-job training and work experience. The skills being developed on-the-job should reinforce or build upon the training delivered by an external training supplier. Often it was suggested that these approaches should be complemented by some form of personal support at work, for example from a mentor. The following quotes provide examples of the approaches recommended by employers.

  > *'. . . Using a range of classroom teaching, reinforcement by workshop activity and on-the-job training, and supported by coaching and mentoring . . .. Using a range of methods to suit both the individual and the circumstances.'*
  >
  > *'. . . Making them feel at ease and putting them with someone who wants to help and who will encourage them. . . . allowing them to attend college, and picking someone with the right attitude.'*
  >
  > *'Internal courses which give students the opportunities to apply learning straight away and also to undertake practical exercises in small groups.'*
  >
  > *'A combination of theory, with emphasis on knowledge and understanding, and real examples.'*
  >
  > *'On-the-job training backed up by off-the-job training, a mixture of learning theory and working on simulations with actually doing it for real.'*

- The second main point made was that off-the-job training should be relevant to the individual's work and related to real life situations. This is illustrated by the following responses.

  > *'The trainee can actually put what they are learning into practice and see the relevance of learning certain skills.'*

> *'The best way to deliver Key Skills training is to relate it to practical use and situations.'*
>
> *'Adapting real life situations, as theory is too abstract.'*
>
> *'We try and relate Key Skills to the job they are doing already, rather than doing something for the sake of it. If we relate it to what they are doing it clicks into place.'*
>
> *'Links need to be made to the real world.'*
>
> *'Make work a learning exercise, to give genuine tasks from which to learn, and to encourage them to gather evidence all the time.'*

One employer felt that employers needed to liaise with training suppliers to ensure that trainees were able to apply what they had learned, in their training, at work.

A number of other suggestions were made by employers to ensure effective delivery of Key Skills training.

- Constant and on-going training:

  > *'Training needs to be ongoing, as it takes a while to make things happen and trainees need a lot of reminding.'*

- Learning by example, or work shadowing:

  > *'The best way is for people to see it in action and then they can relate to it — you can't write down what we do.'*
  >
  > *'Give them a task to do and time to do it.'*

- Giving trainees responsibilities:

  > *'Giving them responsibility and making them feel that they belong — giving the opportunity to prove themselves and to go out and be a part of what's happening.'*

- Providing support for trainees:

  > *'It is important to physically spend time with people, and show how the Key Skill type skills are necessary in a job — to actually show how it fits in and that they are doing it all the time, and then it sinks in.'*

- Ensuring all those involved, *ie* both trainees and trainers understand the reasons for developing the Key Skills.

Reflecting our training supplier respondents' views, those employers who had a direct contract with the TEC for delivering Modern Apprenticeships tended to take an integrated approach to developing Key Skills. In other words, the Key Skills were integrated into the training, assignments and assessment activities for the NVQ, rather than 'bolted on' as a separate activity. One of these employers noted that the best way to tackle Key Skills was to integrate them into their existing programmes and into a normal day's work: 'so that they don't really know they are learning Key Skills'. However another, who also used the integrated approach, had some concerns that integration could mean that it was not always obvious to the trainee that the Key Skills were being developed, and thus they were not being made aware of the importance of the Key Skills.

8.1.3 Are Key Skills developable?

The increasing emphasis on Key Skills by employers has opened up a debate about the extent to which these types of ability can be developed in people or are innate, *ie* the nature *vs* nuture debate. The national survey of employers' perceptions of Key Skills (Dench *et al.*, 1998) found that abilities in written communication, application of number and IT skills fell into a slightly different category to oral communication, working with others, problem solving, and taking responsibility for learning and performance. Whereas the former category was seen as all generally teachable, albeit with the right aptitudes and basic skills, the latter was less so. The report noted that the latter three Key Skills and oral communication depended more on personal disposition, personality and natural ability. General life experiences, family background and socialisation were also seen as having a particular influence on these three Key Skills.

Similar issues were raised by respondents to this WESTEC survey. In the main, the employers questioned did feel that the Key Skills were trainable, and could be developed in young people, but it was clear that some were more difficult to train than others. Improving own learning was viewed as particularly difficult. As one employer noted: 'you can nurture your staff and point them the right way'. It was thought that in comparison with other important attributes required by employers, such as common sense and a positive attitude to work, Key Skills were more easily trainable. However, during the discussions with employers, a number of issues in relation to the trainability of Key Skills were raised. These include:

- **Differing aptitudes.** Several employers acknowledged that some young people may have a better aptitude for certain skills than other young people. One employer felt that one can develop basic skills and lower levels of Key Skills, but to get to the higher levels of some of the Key Skills, individuals need to have an aptitude for these types of skills.
- **The 'right' atmosphere.** As one employer noted, you do need certain positive conditions for development of the Key Skills to succeed:

  > *'You can develop all of the Key Skills in young people, if they are willing to learn, and if they have a good trainer and a good relationship with that trainer.'*

- **Need for basic skills.** One of the employers noted Key Skills can be developed: 'provided they [young people] have the basics'. The national survey also showed that the extent to which the Key Skills can be developed depends on the initial or basic abilities in literacy or numeracy (Dench *et al.*, 1998).
- **Developed naturally.** Several of the employers felt specific training was not necessary for some or all Key Skills, and that some of these skills could actually be developed with

experience at work or awareness in a job, or occur naturally out of the NVQ process.

Further points made in the national study were that trainees need to be made aware of the importance of the 'softer' Key Skills to understand how to exhibit or develop these traits. It was also noted that although it was perhaps necessary to have certain innate abilities to reach a high standard in these skills, it was possible to improve certain techniques for communicating and problem solving through, for example, presentation skills training. These points lead us on to the following section, examining the barriers and problems employers encounter in developing the Key Skills.

8.2 Barriers and problems which employers encounter in developing the Key Skills

Employers identified a number of different barriers or potential barriers to developing skills in young people. These ranged from: difficulties with young people, problems with training suppliers, and problems within organisations, to difficulties in the transition from school to work, problems with Modern Apprenticeship programmes, or to a general lack of understanding about Key Skills. Many of these difficulties mirrored those identified in the training supplier survey. We examine each type of barrier in turn below.

8.2.1 Difficulties with young people

- Many employers noted that young people with the 'wrong' attitude presented a serious barrier to developing these skills. The kinds of attitude problems were unresponsiveness to training, an unwillingness to participate in training, and a lack of motivation and interest. As we noted above, some employers thought that these young people often lacked an understanding or appreciation of the seriousness of work and performance at work.
- Having young people with very poor basic skills was said to leave employers and training suppliers with very little upon which to build Key Skill abilities.

8.2.2 Problems with Modern Apprenticeship programmes

- Some employers felt there were difficulties in cross-referencing between Key Skills and occupational skills in the NVQs. When the cross-referencing works well and the employer or training supplier felt confident about their MA framework, employers had more confidence that the Key Skills were being developed.

- The jargon and terminology used in Key Skills, such as 'range' or 'underpinning knowledge' presented a barrier for trainees. One employer with a direct contract with the TEC for delivering Modern Apprenticeships had attempted to bridge this gap by translating the Key Skill programme into language that trainees would understand.
- Some employers felt there was a lack of obvious relevance of the Key Skill to certain occupations. In these cases they had difficulty developing the young person's ability in the Key Skill area.
- Some employers felt some of the demands of the Key Skills were too high, especially within the time allowed. One employer noted:

> *'You need time and experience to achieve a Modern Apprenticeship and to gain Key Skills and it seems that they* [government and TECs] *are expecting too much in a short space of time.'*

8.2.3 A lack of understanding about Key Skills

- Lack of, or poor, understanding of Key Skills on the part of the employer was clearly a barrier to developing the individual trainee's skills. This lack of understanding runs across industries and organisations, trainers, and also trainees. One employer commented that:

> *'Trainees need to understand that there is a point to learning these skills, they are not just there to fill up the timetable. Links need to be made to the real world. Those providing training need to understand why they are doing the training and the context in which it will be used, and communicate this knowledge to their trainees.'*

Another employer commented:

> *'Everyone needs to be educated in what Key Skills are about. They are not high profile enough among staff and trainees. They don't understand how Key Skills will benefit them.'*

8.2.4 Problems with training suppliers

- One employer spoke of the problem he was having with his training supplier. He felt the supplier did not train the trainee to the standards required by the scheme and to the standards that he, as an employer, required:

> *'They are not addressing all the skills and training needed. There are things in the folder which have not been covered so I have had to push to get things done.'*

8.2.5 Organisational barriers

- For one employer, there was a particular issue around identifying who was taking responsibility for the Modern Apprenticeship trainee and their training. It appeared that no one had taken charge of this role and there was an element of 'passing the buck' going on, which was causing problems.

8.2.6 Difficulties in transition from school to work

- We noted in Chapter 2 that there were few links made between Key Skills developed in school and employment, which allow for the continuous development of the Key Skills. As one employer commented:

  > *'In most cases, there is at least a 12 month gap between developing Key Skills at school and being asked about them at work. It is a stop/start process.'*

8.3 Assessment of Key Skills

8.3.1 On recruitment

The majority of our employer respondents did not formally assess Key Skills of potential, and new, recruits. As one employer commented:

> *'At present the company does not understand enough about Key Skills for Key Skills to influence interviews — Key Skills don't even come into the picture when recruiting.'*

However, it would seem that many of the employers were assessing skills, which are very similar to some or all of the Key Skills, during the recruitment process, but did not use the Key Skill terminology. The Key Skills most commonly informally assessed were: application of number, IT, and communication. Some of the employers interviewed did seem to find the whole recruitment assessment process tricky and spoke of the difficulty in assessing the skills and skill levels of applicants and new recruits.

8.3.2 Indicators used in the recruitment process

The most commonly used indicators to informally (*ie* not using the Key Skill terminology) assess Key Skill ability during the recruitment process were: performance during a selection interview, a review of formal qualifications gained, and a trial period in the job.

The initial selection

The national study found that the application form or CV is usually the first contact between an employer and an applicant, and is nearly always used to shortlist potential recruits for an interview (Dench *et al.*, 1998). A recent survey of employers recruiting young people found that more than 85 per cent of respondents nationally either looked at an application form or CV (Kodz *et al.*, 1997). The national study of employers' perceptions of Key Skills found that the presentation of these documents was used as an indicator of abilities and aptitudes, and written communication skills, in particular (Dench *et al.*, 1998). The information included in the form or CV is also clearly important.

The respondents to this WESTEC survey reported that they looked at formal qualifications, in particular, at this initial selection stage. Such qualifications would be used as an indicator of IT, numeracy and literacy skills. One of the employers who reviewed candidate qualifications, benchmarked the grades gained against the grades required for college entry. Few respondents to the national study and to this study were aware or had used GNVQ qualifications as evidence of abilities in the Key Skills areas. One employer noted that:

> *'Some new trainees had a GNVQ in travel and tourism which gives a good foundation but does not equip trainees with the necessary skills. It covers theory but gives no real exposure to work and real life situations. Also, the GNVQ does not flow neatly into the NVQ.'*

The interview

Interviews continue to be the most important means of assessing potential recruits in almost all organisations. A recent IES survey found that 97 per cent of employers recruiting young people used performance at interview as a selection criterion (Kodz *et al.*, 1997). The national study of Key Skills noted that an increasing number of employers are recruiting to competency frameworks, or at least being more specific about the criteria they were actually assessing people against at an interview. In some cases these would match the Key Skills. One of the larger employers in this WESTEC survey had a system in which they scored candidates' interview performance.

Employer respondents felt that the interview enabled them to assess personality and communication skills, in particular. Several employers felt that personality itself was actually a good indicator of communication skills. In the national study, it was also noted that questioning during interviews could be used to elicit team working, problem solving and improving own learning skills. For example, problem solving skills may be assessed through a series of 'what if' questions (Dench *et al.*, 1998). The WESTEC respondents noted that they would look for, and ask about, outside interests (which one employer felt was often an indicator of good communication skills), as well as relevant work experience. Application of number skills were rarely assessed at interview.

A trial period

Several of the respondents invited candidates to spend some time with them prior to recruitment, either on a day visit to meet colleagues, or for a longer period (up to about four weeks) as a trial. These trials allowed employers to assess a candidate's ability to fit into the team, and essentially the working with others Key Skill. Often during these trials employers could also assess occupational skills by getting candidates to have a go on work equipment: 'to see how they take to it'.

Other assessment tools

Other methods of reviewing the skills of young people mentioned by respondents included:

- recommendations or referrals from a college/training supplier or careers office
- measuring skills against a set of internally developed competencies (which closely match the Key Skills)
- reviewing students' college/training supplier portfolios
- examining the National Record of Achievement (NRA)
- tests, especially aimed at the use of English, numeracy/ simple arithmetic and spelling, and
- one employer used a team building exercise.

Very few of the employers interviewed were aware of the National Record of Achievement (NRA) and even fewer actually used this evidence in their recruitment process. This reflects IES national research, which found that only one-third of employers who had heard of the NRA actually used it as a selection tool (Kodz *et al.*, 1997). However, one of the larger employers who did use the NRA in recruitment commented:

> *'The NRA gives a good indication of what sorts of skills have already been developed, but not necessarily under the Key Skills banner.'*

In the national survey of use of the NRA, it was found that employers could use the NRA to assess literacy, numeracy and oral communication skills, and to a lesser extent inter-personal and problem solving skills (Kodz *et al.*, 1997).

8.3.3 During training

As with assessment of Key Skills during recruitment, most of those employers interviewed (apart from those who had direct contracts to deliver Modern Apprenticeship training) did not formally assess the Key Skills of their young employees during their training. Those with young employees working on Key Skills (usually within a Modern Apprenticeship) tended to leave all or most of the formal assessment of these skills to the training suppliers. Some of the employers were involved in a limited way in the formal assessment of Key Skills, either in providing observations, and witness statements, or in assisting the training supplier to complete skill assessment forms. This limited involvement seemed to be directed by the training supplier rather than demanded by the employer. Many employers were given regular updates and reports by their training suppliers so, although not heavily involved in Key Skill and occupational skill assessment, employers were made aware of the progress of their trainees.

Again, as with recruitment, many of the employers approached assessed the development Key Skills of their young employees during their training, but not formally under the Key Skills banner. These assessment methods ranged from:

- using personal development plans (PDPs)
- regular reviews, *eg* quarterly meetings, with line managers
- regular scheduled but informal chats, to discuss what the trainee had learned so far on their training
- generally keeping an eye on individuals on a day-to-day basis and working closely with trainees.

Very few respondents looked at Key Skills in their appraisal process, although one employer had developed an appraisal system which identified competencies that were very close to the Key Skills.

8.4 Impact of Key Skills development

8.4.1 Impact on individual's performance

Most of the employers questioned felt that the difference between young employees with strong Key Skills and those with weaker abilities in these areas was noticeable. Notable differences were generally centred around greater ability and better performance. Descriptions of young people with the Key Skills were as follows:

> *'They are achievers.'*
>
> *'They have more ability to work on their own initiative, and look for work to do, rather than wait for work to be given.'*
>
> *'They have a "can do" attitude; they understand what they are doing and are equipped to do it.'*
>
> *'They are more dynamic.'*
>
> *'They have higher standards.'*
>
> *'They progress more rapidly.'*
>
> *'They are better at relating with clients and providing a better client service.'*
>
> *'They use their skills regularly.'*
>
> *'They have greater confidence.'*

> *'They have greater enthusiasm and seem to enjoy their jobs more.'*

> *'They can support colleagues more easily.'*

It is interesting to note that a couple of employers felt that differences were especially noticeable in terms of communication and working with others skills.

8.4.2 Impact on individual's employability

Employers also tended to agree that Key Skills were transferable and were important in enabling people to progress. This was both progression within an organisation, and progression to another employer. Employers seemed to think that Key Skills were important for both work and life, commenting:

> *'Key Skills are the basis for any kind of employment.'*

> *'Key Skills are part and parcel of life — their name is good as they are KEY skills for life.'*

Employers also seemed to feel that Key Skills were transferable across industries, with one employer noting:

> *'If you are comfortable with expressing yourself, putting a report together, and being with a customer, it doesn't matter what industry you are in.'*

One employer noted the importance of Key Skills for the future:

> *'Key skills are the biggest part of it. You need all the Key Skills to be confident, to be flexible, and to be able to change. Nothing is certain, like it was before. Young people have got to be adaptable as we don't know what skills are needed in the future. Key skills seem to be the building blocks of other skills; they help identify strengths and weaknesses and help one cope, to be adaptable and flexible. It is good to give young people the opportunity to gain the skills to be able to move on.'*

However, several employers were keen to point out that there were other important factors for progression. One employer noted that, to progress, young people also needed opportunities. Another felt that although Key Skills were indeed important, the most important progression factor was having the right attitude and an open mind. A third employer also pointed out that the Key Skills as a package were important for employability, but that individually the Key Skills are not important for changing jobs. Finally, one employer still felt that Key Skills did not have a high enough profile in her company and industry, and commented:

> *'Until Key Skills are understood and highlighted, and until the gap for Key Skills between education and employment is filled, Key Skills will not be considered important in this industry.'*

9. Implications of the Research

9.1 Issues arising from the research

A number of research issues have arisen through the course of the study and data analysis. These have been categorised as:

- the importance of Key Skills
- the progression from basic skills to Key Skills
- can Key Skills be developed?
- how can Key Skills be developed?
- how should Key Skills be assessed?
- process issues, and the impact of Key Skills.

9.1.1 The importance of Key Skills

There was a clear understanding of the importance of Key Skills among employers, schools, training suppliers and individuals responding to the survey. Our findings suggest that this was particularly the case within schools. The commitment to introduce Key Skills generally came from the top, *ie* senior management. It was understood that Key Skills were important to improve the employability of young people, to provide them with the skills required by employers, and to equip them as effective learners. However, a number of issues have been raised with regard to the relevance of Key Skills to certain situations, and the level of skills required.

The relevance of Key Skills

There can be no doubt that Key Skills are important to employers. In particular, they emphasise oral communication, working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving. Written communication, numbers, and IT receive less emphasis in some occupations and courses of study. However, they are still important and can underlie overall competence in employment.

This research raises the issue of difficulties experienced by teachers and trainers in persuading young people of the relevance of aspects of some Key Skill units in particular occupations, and in the course of studying some subjects. For example, in care, many trainees interviewed did not see numbers and IT as relevant to their work. There is clearly a need to demonstrate the relevance of the Key Skills in the course of training, developing or educating young people. In our research, we came across some imaginative thinking by tutors and teachers to overcome this issue, and to make activities to develop Key Skills relevant to different subjects. There were also, however, examples of teachers and tutors themselves not understanding the relevance and importance of certain Key Skills. In these instances, finding relevant activities to assess and develop Key Skills was presenting some difficulties. This is of some concern, as it is important that Key Skills are not presented to young people in a way which is off-putting and/or perceived to be irrelevant to them.

The importance of Key Skills for the future

It is important to understand that the development of Key Skills is for the future as well as for now. Individuals need Key Skills not only for their present jobs or for what they are currently studying, but also for their future lives. Key Skills are important for the self-employed mindset required increasingly in many jobs. Within increasingly uncertain labour markets, most employers recognise the importance of an appropriately skilled workforce that can adapt to changing circumstances and ensure business success. It therefore seems rather simplistic to view certain Key Skills as only relevant to certain occupations. For this to be understood, there needs to be a demonstration of the benefits of Key Skills, or collateral, rather than just an assertion that they are important.

The level of Key Skills

The level of Key Skills required varies by occupation and by person. This is perhaps especially the case with the use of numbers. For instance, an 'A' level Maths student should not be asked to do a pie chart for their application of number Key Skill unit. Furthermore, high level application of number skills are most likely to be seen as an occupationally specific skill, and not relevant to many jobs. However, in practice, many jobs do involve an element of numeracy. The level of numeracy needed does, therefore, need to be taken into account in designing the syllabus for each course of study. A number of respondents took issue with the level of Key Skills required for their subject area or Modern Apprenticeship programme. It should be noted, however, that Key Skills frameworks for Modern Apprenticeships are being developed, and the levels of Key Skills required are being reviewed.

The relative importance of Key Skills

Within different jobs and courses of study there are varying trade-offs between the importance of technical skills, general education, qualifications, attributes, and attitudes such as motivation, interest and integrity. It is important to understand that Key Skills are not seen as an alternative to these things and that the development of Key Skills is not to the detriment of any of these other skills or attributes. Rather, as most of our respondents understood, Key Skills should be seen as complementing and underpinning further learning.

9.1.2 Progression from basic skills to Key Skills

There was confusion among some respondents around the distinction between basic skills and some Key Skills. In particular, it was felt by some respondents that communication and the use of numbers were basically literacy and numeracy. To some extent this is true. However, the Key Skills go beyond basic skills, to the application of these basic skills. In many cases Key Skills build on basic skills; in others it is possible to gain some Key Skills without basic skills. For example, an individual may have oral presentation skills but have difficulties with literacy.

What was perhaps a major factor in this confusion was the relatively low level of basic skill held by some young people. Before being able to develop the use of numbers in an employment situation, for example, some tutors reported having to ensure that their students could calculate percentages and carry out other basic numerical operations.

Various national initiatives have been introduced in the course of the past year which attempt to improve the basic literacy and numeracy of young people. However, this is an issue which has implications for very early schooling. It is argued that the roots of capability in these areas are based in the very earliest educational experiences. Indeed, a recent study conducted by IES of the skills needed by those looking after pre-school children suggest that, increasingly, concerns are being expressed about poor levels of numeracy, in particular among those looking after pre-school children (Dench, 1998). The development of sound Key Skills, therefore, depends on early education providing sound basic abilities and, in particular, not putting children off. There seems to be a national 'problem' with numeracy, with too many young people and adults alike being frightened of numbers. Sound basic skills underlie the acquisition of certain Key Skills. There is therefore a need for a focus on basic skills acquisition in schools and a need to consider the progression from basic skills to Key Skills.

9.1.3 Can Key Skills be developed?

A clear message arising from this research was that Key Skills can be developed. For example, presentation skills can be developed in an individual by being explicit about what makes a good presentation and providing a structure to this. There is no doubt, however, that some people are naturally more capable in many of the skills involved in the Key Skills, especially those to do with personal and interpersonal contacts and abilities. A number of our respondents felt that early socialisation and family experiences were very important in influencing people's capabilities in these areas. Schools and training suppliers, therefore, have to work with young people who have been subject to varying influences and encouragement. Different approaches to suit different groups of individuals will be necessary, and these are being developed.

What does seem to be the case is that most people have some capabilities which can be developed, but different people will reach different levels of capability. It is important that young people are not discouraged, as many have been, with academic qualifications because they will 'not make the grade'. School and early training experiences can develop basic capabilities in many Key Skills. Further development comes with experience and maturity, through employment and life.

9.1.4 How can Key Skills be developed?

Our research does suggest that Key Skills can be developed in young people. The questions then arise of whose responsibility is it to develop Key Skills — schools, training suppliers, employers or individuals? What is the role of each, and how should Key Skills be developed?

In the course of this study, we have come across a range of different approaches to developing Key Skills, in schools, colleges, training suppliers and employers. All were making some contribution to the development of Key Skills in young people. However, this research was conducted at too early a stage to draw definitive conclusions about which approaches were most appropriate, especially in the long term. Indeed, it seems unlikely that the picture will ever be that precise. Different people learn and acquire knowledge and skills in different ways. It is possible that experience will show that certain approaches are less successful than others, and others are more broadly applicable. However, we outline in Section 9.2.4 some key themes emerging from the research in relation to how Key Skills can be developed.

9.1.5 How should Key Skills be assessed?

The assessment and accreditation of Key Skills emerged as a problematic area. There are a number of debates in this area. Although certain standards of written communication, numeracy and IT can perhaps be set and tested, assessment of the more personal and interpersonal aspects of Key Skills is not straightforward.

How do employers assess Key Skills? Employers say they need team working skills, and that this is one of the most important

Key Skills, but do not seem to select Key Skills in any objective way. There is bound to be an element of subjectivity which enters any assessment, depending on the expectations of the observer or tester. Furthermore, many employers report looking for people who meet their own standards, which they are often unable to articulate. They do, however, operationalise these, for example in an interview or other situations, often based on experience of recruiting and 'knowing' who will suit their business.

How do trainers and schools assess Key Skills? The research has raised issues with regard to the consistency of the standard to which Key Skills are assessed, and also as to whether assessment should be through written evidence, or observation of individuals, or a combination of the two.

What is the value of certification of Key Skills? Should young people be given a certificate to say they have reached a certain standard in Key Skills, or should employers test individuals' Key Skills for themselves? The research has shown that there is a range of views on this issue. Some young people appear to be motivated by external certification which indicates achievement. However, other schools were less interested in external accreditation of Key Skills, although they did see the need to record the development of individuals' Key Skills. If Key Skills are to be certificated, how can a system be developed which does not have the demotivating effect of academic qualifications for some young people, but is seen as an adequate standard by employers? It will take time for any qualification or accreditation to be trusted and valued.

9.1.6 Process issues

There are also a number of issues relating to the process of implementing Key Skills training or development.

- There are clearly some teething problems with the introduction of Key Skills training or development into training organisations and schools. However, there are also some deeper issues, in particular in relation to the 'user friendliness' and the language used in Key Skills units in Modern Apprenticeship programmes and GNVQs. The language is very complex, for trainers, let alone the students, and often needs to be 'translated' to be understood.
- Teachers and trainers are already under pressure — the need for extra work relating to Key Skills has to be weighed carefully. Simpler and direct documentation about how to implement Key Skills teaching is perhaps needed. This might go some way to remove the need for each teacher or trainer having to interpret the Key Skills in their own way, and develop their own examples, to integrate them into the course of study.

- The research shows that some teachers and trainers are keen to share their experiences and the techniques they have developed. However, others are reluctant. Although schools and training suppliers may be competing for students and resources, it is important that the whole area of Key Skills does not become seen as one in which some develop a competitive advantage. There is also a need to share experience and good practice. Through this, improvements will be made and everyone will benefit.

9.1.7 Impact of Key Skills

It is important that the impact of developing Key Skills is understood. There have been difficulties for the research in identifying the impact of the development of Key Skills on young people. This was mostly because of the early stage at which the research was undertaken. In many cases Key Skills initiatives were relatively new, although not necessarily the development of the skill areas themselves. However, respondents were able to provide their own perceptions of the impact of Key Skills. These included improving:

- confidence and self esteem of young people
- motivation of young people
- employability and transferability of skills
- ability to make informed career choices
- disciplines of recording and providing evidence
- provision of a broader and less subject oriented education in schools.

9.2 Recommendations

Arising from the issues outlined above and the findings presented in previous chapters, we provide some recommendations as to how the development of Key Skills among young people might move forward.

In some cases these recommendations are applicable to a range of key players and stakeholders, both national and local, involved with Key Skills. It should be noted that the resource implications of these recommendations have not been assessed.

9.2.1 The importance of Key Skills

- The research highlights the need for further promotion of the importance of Key Skills and an understanding that Key Skills are important for future employability, as well as for now through, for example:

- careers information, to enhance the understanding among teachers and young people of the importance of Key Skills, particularly in the light of the changing nature of work and the increasing pace of change
- dissemination of case studies of employers demonstrating the importance they place on Key Skills
- starting early, *ie* programmes to develop young people's Key Skills, to begin in Year 7
- feeding into the national arena the value of higher education institutions focusing upon Key Skills, both in selection processes and continued progression in their syllabuses
- promoting the value of employers more formally assessing Key Skills on recruitment and developing training programmes for Key Skills outwith Modern Apprenticeships and National Traineeships.

9.2.2 Progression from basic skills to Key Skills

- Basic skills are the building blocks for some Key Skills. It is therefore important that there is a continued and on-going focus upon basic skills going right back to early education. Structured programmes for assessment, diagnostic testing and action planning to develop basic skills all have a role to play.

9.2.3 How can Key Skills be developed?

A number of themes have emerge from the research, in particular the need for:

- **Learning of any sort to be seen as relevant**, to the current course of study in particular, but also in the longer term.
- **Key Skills to be integrated into a main course of study**. There was a general consensus among our respondents that integration of Key Skills in this way was more favourable than stand alone activities, although not always possible. If Key Skills are to survive and be taken seriously, they need to be taught as mainstream. However, there is a danger that if Key Skills are entirely integrated they may get lost. There is therefore still a need for some stand alone activity.
- **The need to be explicit about the Key Skills** and how and where they are being developed. For example, the research showed that where Key Skills were assessed during work experience, young people were more aware of how the Key Skills had been developed.
- **A mixture of different types of learning activities** to meet the needs and modes of learning which suit different individuals.

- **Linkages to be made** across the curriculum, course of study or training.
- **Continuous reinforcement**: employers generally report that a learning event without follow up in the workplace is of little use. This very much applies to Key Skills. Developing these skills is not a one-off activity, something which can be ticked off on a list. They need to be continuously reinforced, through the broader curriculum or in the daily course of a job.
- **Progression**: in an ideal world, Key Skills initiatives in schools would feed into those in further education and training, and in turn into employment to form a seamless whole. At the moment, it is clear that the initiatives which have been introduced are very piecemeal and understandably so — it is very early days. Learning Partnership West and WESTEC might have a role to play in proactively promoting links between schools, colleges and training suppliers so that they can work together on Key Skills.

Key Skills are not just about education and employment, they are also acquired and enhanced through many leisure and social activities — it is important that this is not forgotten. Many young people responding to our survey reported that they had developed their Key Skills through hobbies and leisure activities. Employers often look for examples of non-school activities when recruiting young people to explore their abilities, for example in team working and dealing with problems. It is important that teachers and trainers have an understanding of how young people might develop Key Skills in their leisure activities, so that young people recognise this and are able to demonstrate this for themselves.

9.2.4 How should Key Skills be assessed?

The research findings demonstrate the need for:

- a consistent framework of assessment, between and within institutions and at different levels; this message should be fed back into the national arena
- assessor training for teachers to ensure that standards are consistent and maintained.

However, it should be noted that acquiring good Key Skills is cumulative: employers are not looking for young people with 'perfect' Key Skills, and the development of Key Skills should not end with the awarding of a certificate. It is important that young people are able to demonstrate and provide evidence of the Key Skills that they have throughout their careers, through their abilities in presenting themselves at interviews and preparing applications.

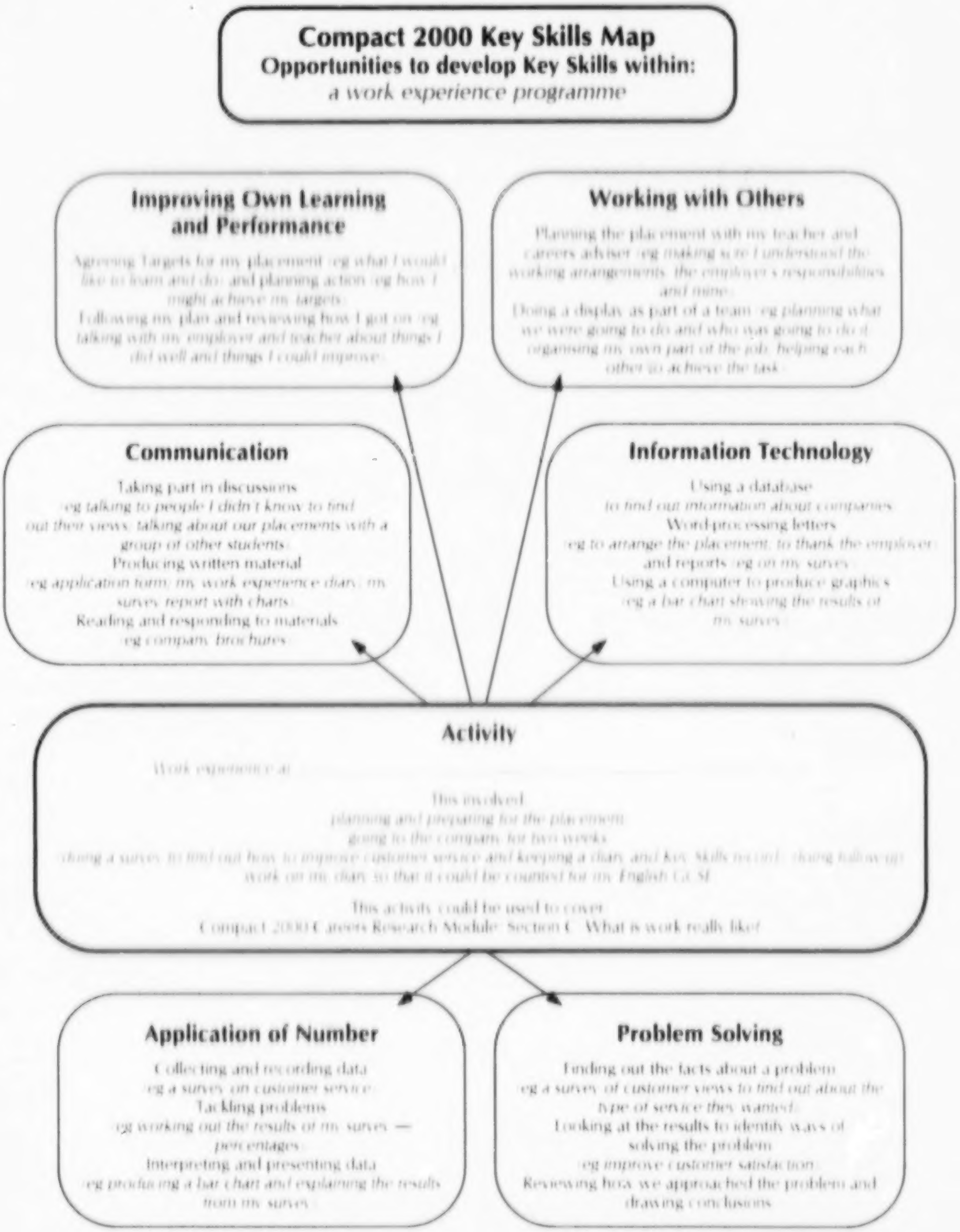
9.2.5 Process issues

- There is clearly a need for information and best practice to be shared and disseminated to avoid duplication of effort, both within and across schools, colleges and training suppliers.
- Clearer documentation of Key Skills units and how to implement Key Skills is also called for.
- The research has also highlighted the need to have someone responsible for Key Skills, *ie* a Key Skills co-ordinator, in schools in particular. Their role should include the overseeing of assessment and supporting the implementation of Key Skills.

9.2.6 Impact of Key Skills

- To assess the impact of Key Skills in the longer term, further research and careful analysis should be conducted, possibly through a longitudinal study which would follow a cohort of young people.

Appendix: Key Skills Map



Compact 2000 Key Skills Map
Opportunities to develop Key Skills within:
a work experience programme

Improving Own Learning and Performance

Agreeing Targets for my placement (*eg what I would like to learn and do*) and planning action (*eg how I might achieve my targets*)
Following my plan and reviewing how I got on (*eg talking with my employer and teacher about things I did well and things I could improve*)

Working with Others

Planning the placement with my teacher and careers adviser (*eg making sure I understood the working arrangements, the employer's responsibilities and mine*)
Doing a display as part of a team (*eg planning what we were going to do and who was going to do it, organising my own part of the job, helping each other to achieve the task*)

Communication

Taking part in discussions
(*eg talking to people I didn't know to find out their views; talking about our placements with a group of other students*)
Producing written material
(*eg application form; my work experience diary; my survey report with charts*)
Reading and responding to materials
(*eg company brochures*)

Information Technology

Using a database
(*to find out information about companies*)
Word-processing letters
(*eg to arrange the placement; to thank the employer*)
and reports (*eg on my survey*)
Using a computer to produce graphics
(*eg a bar chart showing the results of my survey*)

Activity

Work experience at

This involved:
planning and preparing for the placement;
going to the company for two weeks
(doing a survey to find out how to improve customer service and keeping a diary and Key Skills record); doing follow-up work on my diary so that it could be counted for my English GCSE

This activity could be used to cover:
Compact 2000 Careers Research Module: Section C 'What is work really like?'

Application of Number

Collecting and recording data
(*eg a survey on customer service*)
Tackling problems
(*eg working out the results of my survey — percentages*)
Interpreting and presenting data
(*eg producing a bar chart and explaining the results from my survey*)

Problem Solving

Finding out the facts about a problem
(*eg a survey of customer views to find out about the type of service they wanted*)
Looking at the results to identify ways of solving the problem
(*eg improve customer satisfaction*)
Reviewing how we approached the problem and drawing conclusions

Glossary of terms

ASDAN	The ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Youth Award Scheme is available for Key Stage Four pupils. Pupils complete a set of challenges which encourage independent learning. They then identify the Key Skills they have used. Each completed challenge earns a credit allocation. The award is available at four levels: Bronze, Silver, Platinum and Gold.
Compact	Compact is aimed at Year 10 and 11. Compact consists of four ASDAN modules: Self and Work, Careers Research, Transition Planning, and Personal Development. Pupils complete the set tasks, which are focused on careers education. On completion of the tasks they review the Key Skills used and provide evidence of achievement. To achieve the Learning Partnership West Compact Certificate they must recognise their Key Skills and achieve attendance and punctuality goals.
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification. GNVQs are nationally recognised unit based qualifications delivered in schools and colleges as alternatives to GCSEs and 'A' Levels. GNVQs are offered in areas such as health and social care, art and design, business, leisure and tourism, manufacturing, hospitality and catering.
Key Skills	Key Skills, previously Core Skills, are a set of six skills which have been identified as underlying good performance in the labour market, now and in the future. They are: communication skills, application of number, information technology, working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving.
Modern Apprenticeships	Modern Apprenticeships are work based training programmes for young people, which aim to improve the supply of technical, craft and junior management skills at NVQ Level 3. Modern Apprenticeships are partly funded by government through TECs and employers. Since September 1995, Modern Apprenticeships have been offered by all TECs.
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification. NVQs aim to provide qualifications for all vocational areas on a clear and consistent basis. An NVQ is a nationally recognised statement of competence in a given occupational area.
Superskills	Superskills is a profile developed by Learning Partnership West for use with 11 to 14 year olds. Schools identify a set of key skills they want each year group to achieve. The skills are recorded on a profile which is managed by pupils. Different departments take responsibility for teaching and assessing the skills. Pupils receive evidence stickers and certificates to recognise achievement.

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